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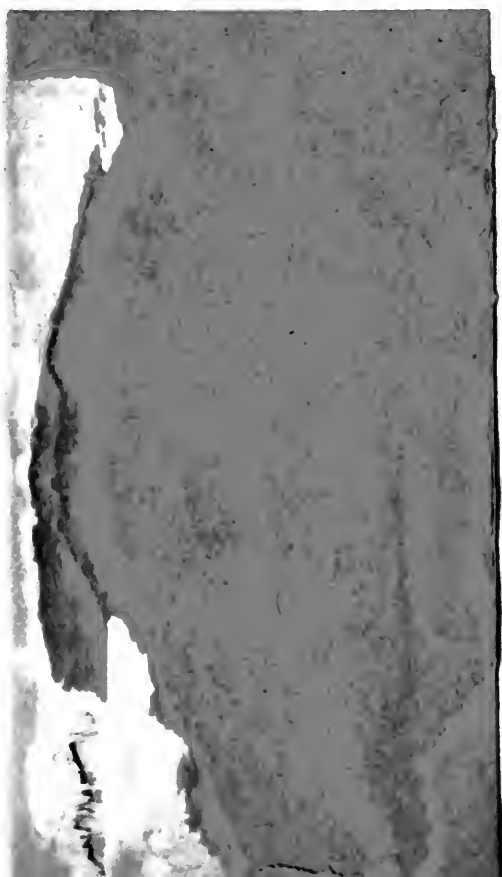
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OUR FOREFATHERS

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BY

GUSTAV FREYTAG

Author of "Debit and Credit," "The Lost Manuscript," etc.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

MRS. MALCOLM



NEW YORK
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1873



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THIS work will contain a series of purely fictitious tales, in which the fates of an individual race are related. It begins with ancestors from the earliest time, and will, if the powers of the author and his pleasure in the work continue, be gradually carried on up to the last descendant—a vigorous fellow who still wanders about under the German sun, without caring much about the deeds and sufferings of his forefathers.

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This volume carries us into times which the poet will understand more easily than the historian. It was a secret pleasure to the author, during his whole labour, to feel that this narrative describes a country of which the men, mountains, and forests, are dear to your Imperial Highness.

GUSTAV FREYTAG.

Leipzig, 16th November, 1872.

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I N G O.

I.

A.D. 357

ON a mountain height, by a barricade of trees which separated the forests of Thuringia from those of the Katten, a young watchman stood and guarded the steep path which led from the lowlands of the Katten to the Thuringian heights. Over his head towered a gigantic beech tree, on both sides of him, along the crest of the hill, ran the boundary fence, and in the thicket bloomed the blackberry and wild rose. The youth held a short spear in his hand, and a long horn hung suspended by a leathern strap round his neck; leaning listlessly against the tree, he hearkened to the voices of the forest, the tapping of the woodpecker, or the soft rustling of the branches as some wild animal passed through the thicket. From time to time he looked impatiently towards the sun, and cast a glance behind him, where, in

the distant opening of the valley, lay blockhouses and enclosures for herds of cattle.

Suddenly he bent forward and listened; on the path before him sounded a light footstep, and through the foliage of the trees the figure of a man became visible, who with quick steps was approaching him. The watchman pulled round his horn, and grasped his spear ready to throw; and when the man stepped out of the thicket on to the open boundary line, he called to him, directing the point of his spear towards him, "Stand, traveller, and give the password, which will save thee from my weapon."

The stranger sprang behind the last tree on his side of the fence, stretched out his open right hand, and replied, "I greet thee peacefully, as a stranger in the land, ignorant of the password."

The watcher answered him suspiciously, "Thou comest not like a chieftain, with horses and attendants, thou carriest not the buckler of a warrior, neither dost thou appear like a wandering trader, with pack and barrow."

The stranger replied, "I come from afar, over mountain and valley; my horse I lost in the whirlpool of the stream, and I seek hospitality among thy people."

"If thou art a foreigner, thou must tarry till

my comrades open our country to thee. Meanwhile let peace be between us."

The men had observed each other with keen eyes; they now leant their spears against the boundary trees, entered into the open space, and proffered hands. In shaking hands each examined the countenance and bearing of the other. The watchman looked with honest admiration at the powerful arm of the stranger, who was but few years older than himself, as well as at his firm deportment and proud mien.

"A sword-fight with thee on the greensward would be no trifling matter," he said, frankly; "I am almost the tallest man on our mead bench, yet I have to look up to thee. Accept a greeting, and rest under my tree, meanwhile I will announce thy arrival."

Whilst the stranger fearlessly accepted the invitation, the watchman raised his horn, and blew a loud call into the valley of his people. The wild tones echoed from the mountain. The watchman looked towards the huts in the distant opening, and nodded his head contentedly, for a movement was visible about the houses; after a short time a horseman hastened towards the heights. "Nothing beats the strong blast of a buffalo horn," he said, laughing, and gliding up to

the stranger in the heather, darted a sharp look along the glade of the wood and into the valley before him. "Speak, wanderer ; there is perhaps a pursuer on thy track, or possibly thou mayest have seen warriors in the wood ?"

"Nothing sounded in the forest but what belongs to it," answered the stranger. "No bloodhound of the Kattens has been watching my path for the last six days."

"The sons of the Kattens come blind into the world, like young puppies," exclaimed the watcher, contemptuously. "Yet I think thou must understand well how to conceal thyself in the forest if thou hast escaped their watching."

"Before me was light, behind me was darkness," proudly answered the stranger.

The watchman looked with interest on the man ; on his brown countenance exhaustion was clearly to be seen ; he leant heavily against the tree. For some time the watchman reflected. "If thou hast to fear the vengeance of the Kattens, thou hast for long days been without fire or smoke, and hast found bad travelling fare, for the wood offers now not even berries or wild fruit. See, I am only a retainer of the Chieftain's ; I know not whether he will grant you his bread and salt ; but a hungry man in the woods I may not shun.

Take and eat from my wallet." The watchman caught up from behind the tree a pouch of badger skin, and offered from it black bread and meat. The stranger looked thankfully at him, but remained silent. Then the watchman held out to him a small horn, and opening the wooden cover, said kindly, "Take also the salt; under this tree is my home, here I am the host."

The stranger seized it. "Blessed be to thee this gift of the Gods; we are friends." He ate ravenously; the youth looked on contentedly.

"When the warm sun sends its rays through the foliage of the trees, then thy office of watcher is a pleasant service," said the stranger, at last renewing the conversation; "but when the wind blusters in the stormy night, then courage is needful for the forest-warden."

"The border boundary here is consecrated to the good Gods of the people," answered the watchman; "from both sides the holy springs run down into the valley, but we forest people are familiar with the night-song of the trees."

"Thou art young," continued the stranger; "thy lord shows great trust in thee, committing to thee singly the care of thy country's boundary."

"There are more men at the boundary fence," explained the watchman. "We fear little an

inroad of hostile bands through the mountain forest, for it would be difficult for the foot of the stranger to penetrate over rock and forest stream up to the fence. But report says that a short time since a fierce war has been kindled between the Alemanni and the Cæsar whom they call Julian, and ten days ago the wild army of the Gods swept past us through the air at night-time"—he looked timidly up to the skies; "since then we have guarded the boundary."

The stranger turned his head, and looked now for the first time towards the native land of his companion. The long waving mountain heights rose in succession one behind the other; across where the opening widened lay a deep valley, and the white foam of the forest torrents sparkled in the sunlight.

"And now let me know, good comrade, whose badge thou wearest, and whither thou art about to conduct me."

"In all the valleys on which your eyes rest, and further down into the plain, he whom I serve, Herr Answald, the son of Irmfried, rules as Chieftain."

"In a foreign land I heard that a great king ruled over the people of Thuringia; they called him King Bisino," answered the stranger.

"Thou hast heard right," assented the youth. "But this forest country is free under its own race of chieftains from the most ancient times, and the great King of the country is contented that we should guard the boundary, and send every year horses to his court. Little do we forest people care about the King, and our Chieftain seldom goes to court at the King's castle."

"And does not King Bisino count your herds of cattle, which I see there among the huts?" asked the stranger.

"Hum—there was once a noise of arms in the villages, because the King would fatten his boars under our oaks, also the King took pleasure in hunting wild oxen in our woods, but one has heard no more of that."

The stranger looked earnestly down into the valley. "And where is the residence of your lord?"

The watchman pointed along the opening of the valley. "It lies at the outlet of the mountains; for a quick walker it is about three hours down the valley, but a horse from the pasture-ground would carry us there in shorter time. Dost thou not hear the sound of hoofs? The horn has announced to my comrades that a stranger needs guidance; he who relieves me is coming."

A horseman was trotting up the forest path—a fine-looking youth, like the watchman in countenance and bearing; he flung himself from his horse, and spoke in a low tone to his companion. The watchman delivered over to him his horn, threw his leather pouch over his shoulder, and offered the horse to the stranger. "I follow your steps," said the latter, declining it; he greeted the new watchman with hand and head, who was regarding him with curiosity, and turned with his leader towards the valley.

The small steep path led down by the winding course of the torrent, amongst giant trees whose long mossy beards shone silver-grey in the sunshine, over roots which lay on the path like huge serpents, and twisted themselves into high arches, where the stones which formerly lay under them had been washed away by the water. The border of the stream was hemmed in by driftwood and heaps of dry rushes; there also the power of the water had in the early spring swept fallen stems against the side, so that they lay with leafless branches in wild confusion; but the knives of the forest people had cut a small path through the tangle of the brushwood. With fleet steps the men hastened down the valley; they sprang with long leaps from stone to

stone, from tree to tree, the young watchman in front. He often swung himself high through the air, as a feather ball sent with a throw bounds merrily along ; and where a wide channel impeded the way he repeated the leap back again in order to give courage to his companion. He had thrown the bridle over the neck of the horse, which, following like a dog, leapt after the man : to the steed also the inequality of the pathway was play-work. The eyes of the watchman measured with satisfaction a powerful leap which the stranger had taken over the torrent, and examined afterwards the footstep on the soft ground. "Thou hast a powerful stride for a weary man," said he ; "it appears to me that thou hast already before now ventured on broader leaps on bloodier heaths. By thy footstep I see that thou art one of our people, for the point of the foot tends outwards, and the pressure of the ball is strong. Hitherto from thy speech I have considered thee as a foreigner. Hast thou ever beheld a Roman footstep ?"

"Their feet are small ; they walk with a short step on the whole sole, like weary people."

"So say our people who have been in the west. I have hitherto only seen the unarmed traders of the black-haired people," he added apologetically.

"May the Fates keep far from your soil the Roman foot!" answered the stranger.

"Thou speakest like our old men; but we young ones think, if they do not come to us, we will certainly go to them, for their country must be wonderful,—all the houses of coloured stone, the whole year soft sunshine, and in winter the earth green, sweet wine as common as thin beer, the vessels and seats of silver; the maidens dance in gold ornaments and silk dresses, and the warrior is lord of all this splendour."

In vain the watchman awaited the answer of the stranger; they walked together for a time quite silent; at last the youth took the horse by the bridle. "Here the road through the valley becomes better; mount, that we may arrive at our destination before evening." The stranger laid his hand on the horse's withers, and sprang with great strength into the seat; the leader nodded contentedly, and whistled softly; the horse bore the rider at a gallop down the valley, and the youth ran on foot beside him, poising his spear, and occasionally shouting to the horse, which then turned its head to him, and neighed in answer.

"Who are the women there in light dresses?" inquired the stranger, as they halted on an

eminence near the open country, and looked into the enclosure.

"Oh," exclaimed the watchman, "the maidens from the Chief's house are come; there is Frida's brown cow; do you hear the pretty bell which hangs round its neck? and there is the maiden herself." The heightened colour in his face betrayed that the meeting would be pleasant to him. "Behold the old huts; in them the herdsmen dwell. In summer the cattle of the village go to the forest pastures, and our maidens come and fetch the produce of the milk cellars to the Chieftain's house. Over there in the beech wood the swineherd dwells with his herd; the sun does not shine in any country on finer mast."

They entered the clearing, the watchman removed the bars which impeded the entrance to the cattle pen, and the stranger rode into the enclosure, where the cows were running about bellowing, whilst the wife of the herdsman with her maidens carried the milk pails to the cool cellars, which were built of stone and moss, away from the sun, and held long rows of milk vessels.

"Good luck, stranger!" exclaimed the watcher. "Our Chieftain's daughter, Irmgard, is herself

here looking after the herds ; if she is gracious to thee, thou mayest be sure of good care."

" Which of them dost thou thus name ? " asked the stranger.

" There she is, giving orders to the maidens ; thou mayest easily know her."

The noble maiden stood by the cart which, with two oxen harnessed to it, was to convey the contents of the milk cellar to the Chieftain's house ; also butter firmly beat down in casks made of the wood of the wild plum-tree, and cheese seasoned with caraway seeds, packed in green leaves.

" Go to her, comrade, and say that a stranger approaches her as a suppliant."

" I fear to address the daughter of the Chieftain, so long as her father has not granted me a seat at his hearth. And as thou art disposed to be friendly, speak well of me as far as thou canst." The stranger sprang from the horse, and from the distance bowed low to the young lady.

Her golden tresses, which hung in ringlets about her stately figure, formed a framework to the marked features of the youthful face, and flowed down far below her waist. A girdle ornamented with silver confined her white linen vesture ; over it she wore a short upper dress of

fine wool elegantly embroidered ; her arms were uncovered, and upon her wrists golden circlets. She looked with her large eyes at the stranger, and answered his respectful salutation with a slight inclination of the head. The watchman approached the Chieftain's daughter.

"The stranger seeks a place with our people, and a corner at our hearth for his weary head. I have conducted him to the homestead, that the Chief may decide upon his fate."

"We grant rest to the wanderer whom the Gods send us. He, whoever he may be, good or bad, that approaches our hearth begging for hospitality, has a room for three days ; then my father will ask whether he is an honest man, and not unworthy of our roof. For thou thyself, Wolf, knowest that many desperate people wander in misery through the country, and carry the curse that cleaves to their footsteps into the house of the honest man."

"He looks like one who would act honourably by friend or enemy," said the watchman.

The noble maiden cast a rapid glance at the stranger. "If he prove himself to be such as thou sayest, we may rejoice at his arrival. Hand him a cup of milk, Frida."

The stranger drank, and as he returned the

cup with thanks, said, "Blessings upon thy kind hand. My first greeting in this country was willingly offered me by a warm-hearted man; may the second be a presage to me that I shall find that peace in the Chief's house for which I so passionately long."

Meanwhile the watchman had caught for himself one of the horses which were galloping about in the enclosure. Whilst he was preparing to mount, the rosy-checked Frida came and said to him mockingly, "Thou hadst good fortune, Wolf, in thy sleep; a stranger bird was caught on the border thorn-tree, whilst thou wast reposing. How was thy sleep, watchman, on thy thorny bed?"

"The owl would not let me sleep; it groaned over Frida, who stands at night by the fence and shakes it, in order to learn from whence a husband will come to her."

"But I saw a thistle-thrush on a dry bush collecting old thistle-wool for a marriage-bed for the rich Wolf."

"And I know a proud one," answered Wolf, angrily, "who trampled on the violets which she went to seek, and so doing fell among the nettles!"

"Not among the nettles of thy fields, thou stupid Wolf," replied Frida, angrily.

"I know one to whom I will not throw the ball at the next dance," answered Wolf.

"When the wolf dances, the geese fly up on a tree, and laugh," said Frida, mockingly.

"Twine thyself a garland of oat straws, my haughty goose," shouted Wolf from his horse, as he trotted away with the stranger, who with delicate feelings had kept a spear's-length away from this bantering talk.

"He is an ill-mannered youth," said Frida complainingly to her mistress.

"What thou didst shout into the wood has been echoed back to thee," answered the latter, laughing; and casting a glance after the stranger, she continued, "He looks like one who has ruled over many people."

"And yet his sandals were torn, and his jacket travel-worn," said Frida.

"Do you think that the rocks cut the feet of the poor wanderer only? We believe that he who comes from afar has seen and dared much; we feel sorry if he has become a bad man from avarice or need, and we would gladly give him peace if we could."

The sun was setting, and the trees cast long shadows across the road, when the two horsemen reached the end of the valley. On both sides the

hills receded; by the side of the brook the ground was covered with fresh grass and bright meadow flowers. A red-haired fox crossed the path in front of them.

"The red-head knows that the dwellings of men are near," said the watchman; "he likes to lurk where he can hear the crowing of the cocks."

Before them in the evening light lay the village, enclosed by a ditch and a bulwark planted with trees; through the intervals of the trees white gables under brown thatched roofs were here and there to be seen, and small clouds of smoke rose from the roofs. Apart from the village, on a small eminence, the dwelling of the Chief reared itself, surrounded by its own special palings and ditch. Above the numerous buildings and stables of the residence towered high the roof of the great hall, the ridge of which was ornamented with beautifully carved horns.

A troop of boys were practising warlike games in the meadows in front. They had erected a high scaffold, and were each in his turn springing up to the top and down again, shouting with pleasure. As the horsemen approached, the boys ran on to the road and stared defiantly at the

stranger. The watchman called one of the boys, and whispered to him; the boy flew bounding along like a young deer to the Chieftain's house. whilst the horsemen with difficulty restrained their spirited steeds. The little children danced in a circle in the village street—the little boys naked all but their woollen jackets, the little girls wearing white shifts; they were singing and stamping bare-footed in the dust. The ring broke up when the horsemen approached. Women's heads were visible at the apertures of the houses, and out of each door sprang a troop of blue-eyed children; men also came to the doors, scrutinizing with keen looks the appearance of the stranger, and the watchman did not fail to warn his companion to look to the right and left, and greet the inhabitants as he rode along; "For," said he, "a friendly greeting opens the heart, and thou mayest soon need the good-will of the neighbours."

Meanwhile the boy had run to the Chief's dwelling. Prince Answald was sitting in a wooden arbour which formed a shady screen in front of his dwelling: he was a tall man, broad-shouldered, with a frank countenance under his grey hairs. He wore over his shirt a woollen jacket trimmed with beaver skin, his leather

stockings were laced with gay-coloured straps, and only his dignified deportment and the respect with which the others spoke to him showed him to be the master of the house. He sat surrounded by his companions, and looked with satisfaction on the two well-fed oxen that were being driven past him by the farm servant, because they were selected to be sacrificed for an approaching feast to the principal dwellers of the district. The boy presented himself adroitly, and made known his message in a whisper to an old man with shrewd countenance, who stood to the left of the Chief, and knew well how to give courteous answers to his master.

"The young Wolf brings a stranger here," stated the old man, in answer to the enquiring look of his Chief. "The man came without escort by the Kattens, without a horse, or the dress of a warrior; a solitary and unhappy man, he seeks hospitality."

"Prepare him a welcome in the hall," said Prince Answald, calmly, giving a signal to the men to leave him; and to his trusty friend he said, "I see with anxiety foreign strollers. Since the kindling of the Roman war on the Rhine, hot sparks fly through the land, and many a fellow who is the victim of violence roams from one

country to the other, committing outrage from a spirit of bitter hate."

"If he comes as a fugitive from the south, he may have intelligence of the Roman war."

"He may also bring Roman treachery into the country. Roman manners creep like a pest through our valleys; they have filled the King's citizens with arrogance. Our nobles also parade themselves in purple dresses, and maintain roguish body-guards, who plant their knives in the back of the free man, when his looks do not please their master. But whoever the stranger may be, he shall receive whatever is due to a famishing man. Do thou, however, take care that by judicious talk thou discoverest his secret."

The Chieftain entered the house, and placed himself on the chair of state, a carved oak chair covered with the skin of a young black bear, that stood opposite the door. The Prince's feet rested on a stool, and in his hand he held his Prince's staff.

Outside the entrance the two horsemen dismounted; the stranger leaned his spear against the doorpost, and seated himself silently before the door. The Herald came out and invited him, with solemn greeting, to appear before the Chieftain. The stranger trod the threshold of the

house with head erect; he and the Chief for a moment exchanged searching looks, and both were pleased with what they saw.

"Hail to thee, Prince Answald, son of Irmfried!"

"Hail to thee, also!" was returned from the seat of state.

"Bestow on the way-weary man a drink from thy horn, fruit from thy fields, and the protection of thy roof; I come friendless, homeless, defenceless, to thy hearth; bestow upon me what the hospitality of thy people allows to the wanderer."

Hildebrand stepped forward, and said, "The Prince bestows upon thee, according to the custom of the people, three days' rest and three days' food. Then the Prince will enquire of the people their will. Place him a seat at the hearth, boys, and offer him the gifts of the Gods."

Three youths brought the things that he ordered,—one a stool on which the stranger sat down, another bread and salt in two dishes, and the third a wooden mug filled with dark beer. This one offered the drink first to the Prince, who touched the mug with his lips, then gave it to the stranger. After this the Herald gave a sign to the attendants, and all left the room.

"And now, stranger," began Hildebrand, familiarly seating himself at the feet of the Prince,

"as thou hast obtained security for body and limb, give us an account, as far as thou canst, whether thou hast seen or heard aught behind our hills which can be of use to us and not injure thee. For these are anxious times, and the prudent Host endeavours to obtain information from wandering men. Wilt thou narrate, if the Gods have given thee the power of freely uttering thy words; or shall I ask what it needs us to know?"

The stranger rose. "I bring information which will move the hearts of men; I know not whether it will occasion you joy or sorrow. A battle has been fought, the greatest in the memory of man. Wolves howl on the battle-field, and ravens fly over the bones of the Alemanni, to whom our God has refused victory. The Franks have won the battle for the Romans; the kings of the Alemanni, Huodomar and Athanarich, are prisoners, and many of the king's children with them; the hosts of Cæsar carry fire and sword into the valleys of the Black Forest, as far as the Main, and drive before them prisoners in crowds. Cæsar has become so powerful, they say, over the borderland, that the Kattens have sent an embassy to his camp to offer an alliance."

A deep silence followed these exciting words.

Prince Answald looked down gloomily, and Hildebrand also had difficulty in concealing his emotion.

"We are at peace with Romans and Alemanni," he said at last, cautiously; "and we Thuringians do not fear the might of Cæsar. But thou thyself, as I perceive, wast in the neighbourhood when the battle was fought, and thou hast since then avoided the villages of the Kattens, who, as thou sayest, are inclined towards the Romans. I do not ask thee to whom thou hast wished the victory."

"I give information without questions," exclaimed the stranger, proudly. "I have not taken Roman pay."

A ray of kindness shot from the eyes of the Chief. "Thou art not an Alemann," he said; "from thy speech thou art one of the children of our Gods, who dwell far in the east."

"A Vandal from the Oder," replied the stranger, hastily.

"It is a far way from thy native land to the battle-field on the Rhine, wanderer. Have thy people sent any warriors to the fight?"

"I came to the Rhine without any of my countrymen. A bitter fate has driven me from the halls of my home."

"A bitter fate is the work of God, or of the perversity of man. May thy heart not be oppressed by what has scared thee from thy home!"

The stranger bowed his head gratefully. "The anxiety of the guest is to please his Host; forgive me if I seek to learn what makes thee so familiar with the stranger. I have heard in my home, from a song of the minstrels, that in my father's time a hero from Thuringia fought among the warriors of my people against the Romans, far south by the Danube: Irmfried was his name."

The Prince drew himself up in his seat, and said, "His hand lay with a blessing on my head he was my father."

"He became a blood-brother to a warrior of my people. When the Prince departed from my home, he with powerful hand broke in two a Roman gold-piece, and left the half behind, that it might be a token of friendship for later generations. If the half of the gold-piece is thine, the other is mine."

He held the bright bit of gold towards the Prince, who rose eagerly from his seat, and examined the piece at the light.

"Keep silence!" he exclaimed, imploringly. "Let no one speak a word. Go, Hildebrand, and carry to thy mistress this token, that she may

put it to the other half, and tell her to be alone when I bring the stranger to her."

Hildebrand hastened out; the Host drew near to the guest, and regarded him with astonishment from head to foot.

"Who art thou, man, that bringest so high a greeting to our house?" then, joyfully continuing, "There is no need to seek for a token; ever since thou hast passed the threshold thou hast stirred my heart. Come with me, thou Hero, that thou mayest tell me thy name, where both halves of the secret token will be joined." He stepped hastily forward; the stranger followed.

In her chamber stood Frau Gundrun, the Princess, holding both halves of the gold-piece together. "Here are two ears from one stalk," she exclaimed to her husband; "what thou sentest me is King Ingbert's token."

"And he who kneels to thee, Princess," said the stranger, "is Ingo, son of King Ingbert."

A long silence followed this declaration. The lady looked shyly at the proud warrior, and on the noble countenance of the princely form, and bending low, greeted him, but the Prince exclaimed anxiously—

"Often have I wished to see the countenance of the hospitable friend, the illustrious hero of

the race of the Gods; my father has told me of the costly household and the powerful followers in shining armour. But far otherwise have the higher powers ordained our meeting. In the dress of a wanderer, as a stranger suing for hospitality, I behold the great King, and fear is in my heart. The hour in which I behold thy face portends good. Yet methinks I show thee most honourably my trust."

"I do not come to thee and the Princess as a fortunate one," said Ingo, seriously; "I am a fugitive, and I will not by concealing my fate creep under thy protection. I am driven from my father's home by my own uncle, who, after my father's death, took the throne from his boy. Trusty friends carefully concealed me till I grew to man's estate; danger is my lot; the King's messengers have followed me from nation to nation; they offer presents, and demand my person. With a small body of faithful followers I fought with the Alemanni; their great Kings were gracious to me; on the day of battle I led a troop of their people. Now Cæsar, proud of victory, seeks for him who would not submit bare-footed. His power reaches to the castles of kings. I saw the messengers of thy neighbours the Kattens riding to the Rhine, with tokens of peace, and I

have therefore gone secretly six days and nights along the path of the wolves through their country: it was marvellous that I escaped them. It was fitting that thou shouldst know this before thou sayest, 'Be welcome, Ingo.'"

The Host looked uncertain, and sought the eyes of his wife, who sat in her chair looking down. "What is honourable, and what my oath demands of me, that will I do," said Prince Answald at last, and the clouds passed from his brow. "Be welcome, Ingo, son of a king."

"Thou displayest a noble mind, Hero," began the Princess, "since thou darest to bring danger to the dwelling of thy hospitable friend. But it befits us to consider how we can at the same time show fidelity to thee, and guard our dwellings from danger. Far sounds the name of a king through the country, and many enemies lurk round a hero that is bereft of a crown; thou thyself hast painfully experienced it. Therefore I think that only caution can help thee and us to safety. And if I may venture to give my husband an honest opinion, it appears to me it would be well that thy guest should remain unknown in thy house, and that none should be made aware of his arrival but thou and I alone."

"Shall I conceal a worthy guest in my own

house?" exclaimed the Host, displeased; "I am no servant of the Cæsars nor of the Kattens."

"But the King of Thuringia also likes to eat his repast from the golden dishes which have been prepared by Roman art," continued the wife; "beware of awakening the King's suspicions."

The guest stood immovable, and in vain did the Princess try to ascertain his opinion.

"It is difficult to conceal noble blood in a servitor's dress," objected Prince Answald.

"The Hero Siegfried also, whom the minstrel made mention of, stood in a hind's dress behind the anvil."

"And at last cast the anvil to the ground, and the smith after it," cried the Host.

"Speak, Ingo, thyself; how wouldst thou have us treat thee?"

"I am a suppliant," answered the guest, with self-restraint, "and it is not for me to contend as to how high or low thou rankest me among the companions of thy bench. I do not boast of my name, but I do not conceal it, and thou will not put me to common work."

"He thinks like me," exclaimed the Prince.

"Heroes always fear anything touching their honour," said the Princess, laughing. "What I

ask is easily granted : only be pleased to wear for a short time the dress which we give to strangers in our house ; in the meantime my husband will gain the good-will of the people for thee. The war will not last for ever on the frontier. Cæsar will not fail to have new conflicts ; in a few months the noise will die away, and meanwhile we may succeed in gaining also the King."

"I will think it over till to-night," said the Host, "for my wife is a prudent counsellor, and I have often tried her advice. Till then conceal thyself, O Hero, by an humble demeanour ; but believe me, with an oppressed heart do I long for the day when, in open hall, I can announce what thine and my honour demand."

Thus the men left the chamber of the Princess. In the evening, however, when the husband was sitting down on his couch, he exclaimed angrily, "It cuts me to the heart that I shall see him in the lowest place on the bench."

But the Princess answered quietly, "First prove whether he is worthy of thy protection, for the manner of the stranger is uncommon, and his destiny joyless ; his secret we will conceal from every one, even from our child Iringard."

II.

THE BANQUET.

THE banquet for the expected guests was being prepared at the house of the Prince. The Hostess went with the maidens through the rooms where the kitchen stores were kept. Long rows of hams were hanging there, round sausages and smoked ox-tongues. She was pleased with the good provisions, directed that they should be taken to the kitchen, and ordered the maidens to make a mark on the best pieces, in order that the carver might place these on the table of the elder guests. Then she went to the cool cellars, arched with stone, which were situated at a corner of the dwelling where little sunlight came, being protected with earth and turf; there she selected the barrels of strong beer and the jugs of mead, and looked doubtfully at some foreign-looking clay vessels which stood in the corner, half buried in the ground.

"I do not think that my lord will require wine, yet if he calls for it, tell the cupbearer to take the small one, for the others may be kept for a greater feast day. And see to it yourself that the awkward fellows do not break the costly vessel; for what has been brought with great pains, packed with straw, from a foreign land, by horses and men, may, after its long journey, very easily be spoilt by the awkwardness of boys when they are full of mead."

She gave another searching look through the large room. "There are stores enough for a Chieftain's house, and may the mead for many a year rejoice the hearts of our men; may the Gods grant that our heroes may all drink cheerfully and honourably. And listen, Frida: one knows well what is usually required by men, but drink defies calculation, even when abundant. Let three bottles of old mead be taken out of the stores, and tell the cup-bearer, if the men are peaceable and conversing respectably, this also may be offered them at the end; but if they become angry with each other, and get into discordant wrangle, he must be cautious in helping them, so that no great evil may ensue."

The lady then stepped into the kitchen, where

great fires were burning on stone plates. The young men were occupied in front of the house cutting up fat oxen, some large deer, and three wild boars, and attaching the meat to long spits. The maidens sat in a row, plucking many fowls, or kneading with their hands spiced wheaten dough into large balls. The village boys awaited with smiling countenances the time when they should turn the spits, that they also might have a savoury share from the feast of the heroes.

Meanwhile the Chieftain's men were occupied in the great hall. The grand building stood in the middle of the court, formed of thick pine-wood beams; a staircase led to the open door; inside two rows of high wooden columns supported the beams of the roof; from the pillars up to the wall on both sides ran raised benches; in the middle, opposite the door, stood the seats of honour for the Host and the most distinguished guests; near them a space beautifully adorned like an arbour, for the ladies of the house, that they might look on at the banquet of the men as long as they liked. The younger men decked the wooden arbour with blooming branches which they had brought from the fields. Outside Wolt was driving up a large waggon, with rushes

and reeds to strew on the floor, which he had cut from the banks of the nearest pond.

"It is well to be here, guest," began Wolf, greeting Ingo; "the Princess was gracious to thee; thou hast now a new dress, woven by our women: how does the cloth of the maidens of Thuringia suit thee?"

"What is willingly offered sits comfortably on the receiver," answered the stranger, laughing. "I rejoice to hear thy voice again; thou hast been for days away."

"We herdsmen have been with the dogs to fetch the animals from the wood to be roasted for the feast," replied the man. "Help me, Theodulf!" he cried out to one of his companions; "am I to clear the waggon alone?"

Theodulf, a proud man of the Prince's retinue, pushed his hand stiffly among the rushes, and said over his shoulder to the stranger, "He who is wont to beg for a stranger's dress should not stand idle when better men are using their hands."

Ingo looked frowningly at the speaker, a tall soldier-like figure, broad-chested, with a long scar on his cheek, who returned the look of the stranger with equal defiance. At the eyes of the one was kindled the anger of the other, till the

looks of both opponents darted flames at one another. But Ingo, with great self-control, restrained his wrath, and turning his back, answered, "If thou hadst spoken kindly, I should willingly have followed thy suggestion."

But the watchman whispered to him, "Take care not to irritate him; he is a cross-grained fellow, who gladly gets into a quarrel; he is related to the Princess, and he does not serve as we do, for he is of noble race, has only engaged himself for a time, and will some day succeed to the rich inheritance of his father. No wonder that the rushes prick him when he is obliged to carry them."

"He who serves must carry," replied Ingo, moodily.

The maidens also took notice of the fête dress of the stranger.

"See, my lady, how proudly the stranger steps in the doublet bestowed upon him by the Princess," said Frida to Irmgard.

"A gallant spirit ennobles the meanest dress," replied Irmgard.

"Mean!" exclaimed Frida; "the jacket is of the best cloth from our chest; I must know it, for I myself stitched it. It is singular that the Princess should have bestowed it upon a traveller!"

"But he is truly no every-day man," answered Irmgard.

"That I think also," assented Frida inquisitively, "for I observed a little while ago the Princess accosting him in the house when he came in her way; on both sides it was a princely greeting. She smiled on him, and laid her hand on his dress, as if he were an intimate member of her kindred."

"When the stranger yesterday evening approached the hearth round which the men were assembled," replied Irmgard, "my father, who before had been carelessly joking with the menials, on seeing the stranger, changed his demeanour, and rose from his seat as if to meet him, though he did not, however, do it; yet from that moment his manner was stately, and the meal as quiet as if a messenger from the King's court were sitting at the Prince's table."

"The stranger also," continued Frida, eagerly, "walked with dignity up to the Prince, as though he would take his place by the seat of honour, and one of the boys had to draw him back by the jacket to his place, that he might not be forgetful of proper respect."

"I saw it," added Irmgard, with a nod; "he smiled at it;" and she smiled herself at the recollection.

"Yet he sits quite low down on the bench," exclaimed Frida; "and now that witty Wolf has begun again to stir his great tongue, he has to listen to all the wisdom of the boys."

"If there is a secret," said Irmgard, in a low tone, "it will certainly be announced to us maidens at last."

"But thou thyself, lady," said Frida, "hast shown him little favour lately. We were the first whom he greeted so honourably, and for three long days thou hast avoided speaking to him. The man will blame thee as unfriendly and hard-hearted, and he has not the boldness to venture to accost thee, as he comes in such miserable plight; therefore do thou offer him a greeting at last."

"Let us do what is proper," answered Irmgard.

She moved with calm self-possession towards the troop of proud youths who were in the habit of following the Prince when he rode through the villages, or in the front of the battle. But when she came near the stranger, she became shy of speaking to him before others, and stopped by Theodulf, saying, "I heard your hunting horn late yesterday; had you good sport, cousin?"

Theodulf coloured with joy because the Prince's child had greeted him before the others.

He related to her his good fortune in the chase, and led her to a wooden partition, where a two-year-old bear was sitting very discontentedly. "The hounds seized him by the skin, I bound him with thongs, and brought him alive to the house; he will become a playfellow for the children in the village."

When Irmgard had looked at the brown bear, and gone away with Frida, the latter exclaimed indignantly, "Truly, you have spoken politely to the stranger."

"I was near enough to him," answered Irmgard, "and yet he was silent."

"He knows better what is due to the Prince's daughter," replied Frida.

But Irmgard watched the stranger after that, and when she saw him leaning apart from the others, against the fence of the courtyard, she went over to him alone, stopped, as if accidentally, and said, "On the elder tree over thy head a small grey bird dwells—the nightingale. The maidens exorcise every evening the weasel and the screech-owl, that they may not destroy the nest. If he sing to thee, listen to him kindly, that he may delight thy friendly spirit. They say that in his songs he reminds every one of what is dear to him."

Ingo answered cordially, "All birds—the hawk in the air and the singer in the bush—sing the same song to the ear of the stranger; they remind him of home. There the dear mother once scattered winter food for the birds, that they might sing to her son good omens for his life. They have since then kept faith with him. Many a time have the wild feathered messengers warned the restless man, on the heath and in the forest, of dangers; they have been the companions of his destiny; like him they wander homeless over the earth, and like him feeding themselves either upon the prey which they seize, or on the gifts bestowed on them by an hospitable friend."

"And yet they find everywhere materials from which to build their nest," replied Irmgard.

"But where can the homeless make his house?" asked the guest, earnestly. "He who stands on his own threshold, and counts the horses on the inheritance of his father, he knows not how poverty gnaws at the heart of the proud man, when he must accept the gifts he himself would like to bestow on others."

"Thou complainest of the hospitality of the house at whose hearth thou hast been received," answered Irmgard, reproachfully.

"I call the Host and his lady blessed, who are gracious in their noble house to a stranger in the land," replied the guest. "But the thoughts of the man to whom a corner on their bench is granted ramble insecurely. For the stranger must ever watch anxiously the aspect of the Host, whether he still keeps his favour. Every one in the house stands secure in his rights; only to the wandering stranger is the ground on which he treads like a thin sheet of ice, which in the morning, perhaps, may break under him; and whenever a mouth is opened, he knows not whether it signifies honour or shame. Do not be angry with me for this complaint," he begged frankly. "Thine eyes and thy words have drawn out secret cares from my breast, and too boldly have I ventured on confidential speech. It would be painful to me to displease thee."

"I shall think of thy words in the future," answered Irmgard, softly, "whenever I see a lonely wanderer at our house. But be assured that thou art welcome here to many. The Thuringians like a cheerful spirit and sociable talk; shew thyself thus to-day among our neighbours; and if I may venture to give thee good advice, do not turn aside from the young men when they practise their warlike games; for I

think that thou also mayest succeed well in these. If thou gain praise among our countrymen, it will give pleasure to our house, for it is an honour to the Host when the guest wins fame. And I observe that my father also wishes thee well." She bent her head, blushing, and moved away from the neighbourhood of the stranger; but he looked joyfully after her.

The Prince stood in front of his house to receive the nobles and the free peasants who arrived from all sides on horseback and on foot, and were greeted at the gateway by the Herald Hildebrand. Those who approached on horseback dismounted there, and the young men led their horses into a large enclosure, and fastened them firmly, that the servants might rub the foam off with straw, and scatter old oats in the crib. All were worthily greeted and accosted. The guests stood in a wide circle in the court—a proud company, distinguished men from twenty villages of the neighbouring country, all in their warlike apparel, with ash spears in their hands, swords and daggers by their sides, in beautiful leather caps which were adorned with the tusks and ears of wild boars; many towered over the rest in iron helmets, with leather collars or coats of mail over their white shirts, and in high leather

stockings which reached up to the body ; many also who were rich, and esteemed the wares of the Rhenish traders, wore a loose garment of foreign material, that had fine hairs of bright colours, and shone like the delicate fur of a wild beast. The men stood silent, rejoicing in the meeting : only some who stepped aside together, exchanged words in a low tone upon the reports which had flown through the country of the great battle in the west, and of the threatening times. But those who knew the characters of the men, like Hildebrand the Herald, perceived that their minds were unsettled and their opinions dissimilar. The reception lasted long, for single individuals kept still coming, who had loitered, till at last the Herald went up to the Chieftain, and pointed to the sun.

Then the Host led his guests in front of the hall, and they solemnly ascended the steps in procession ; at the entrance they were received by the Hostess ; near her stood her daughter and the maidens. The men did homage respectfully to the ladies ; the Princess extended her hand to all, and duly enquired after their wives and the state of their families ; to the men of their kindred she offered her cheek for a kiss. The Chiefs of the people took high places on the seats of the

gallery, and began earnest converse, whilst the cup-bearer and servants entered in long rows, bearing the welcoming draught in wooden cups, and light dainties, such as white spiced cakes, and smoked meat.

Meanwhile the youths were impatiently preparing, on the lawn in front of the house, the course for the martial games. The village boys began the competition, that they also might win the praise of the warriors; they ran races, sprang over a horse, and shot at a perch with reed arrows. But soon the youths were seized with emulation; they threw the spear, and cast the heavy stone, springing after it; and when Theodulf, with a powerful swing, had thrown the heaviest stone, and made the widest leap, a fathom beyond the others, there burst forth a loud shout reaching to the hall, and even the old and the wise heads of the people could not keep their seats any longer, but hastened to the exhibition on the lawn. Great became the circle of spectators; the women of the village stood there in their festive dresses, separated from the men, and in the surrounding circle the sound of the acclamations and the praises of the victor became ever louder.

Among the spectators stood Ingo, watching these feats of agility and strength. Then Isan-

bart, an old Chief of the district, stepped up to him, and looking at him searchingly, began so solemnly that others ceased speaking.

“Among thy people also, stranger, from wherever thou hast thine origin, the young warriors undoubtedly exercise themselves in leaping and feats of arms; I see by thine arm and eye that thou art not quite unacquainted with the game; perhaps it will please thee to show our young men what the practice is in thy home, even though thou mayest not be as well versed in the art as a Chief. If thou art from the east, as I conceive, thou must at least know how to swing the wooden club: this throw also shows the strength of the man, although my countrymen practise it little. In the hall I saw such a club over the seat of the Host.”

Ingo answered the good old man, “If the Prince and the Chiefs of the people will allow me, I will attempt what I have formerly learnt.”

The Prince nodded. One of the retinue rushed to the house, and brought with him a weapon of oakwood, curved backwards from the handle, with a sharp edge in front. The club was passed from hand to hand, and the men weighed the light tool, laughing.

“This weapon is similar to what our swine-

herd carries to destroy wolves," cried Theodulf, contemptuously; but the old man Isanbart answered reprovably, "Thou speakest foolishly; I saw a skull broken like a clay jug with a club not so heavy as this." And he laid the club in the hands of the Host.

"Any one who has ridden over a field of battle in the eastern marches," said the Prince, "knows well the wounds made by the stroke of this knotted weapon. Yet I have heard from old warriors that a secret lies in the wood, and that it is difficult to master the throw; for it may maliciously strike the incautious one's own head. This wooden club is not unworthy of the hand of a noble, for in former days it was a king's weapon, and my father brought it home from a foreign country."

"Then it shall show its powers to the son," cried out Ingo, joyfully catching hold of it. With a smart swing of the arm he threw the club; it flew in circling curves through the air; but when all thought that it would strike the ground, it came, as if drawn by a cord, back again to him: he caught hold of it in the air by the handle, and threw it again hither and thither, always quicker, and it always returned obediently to his hand. So easy and frolicsome did the game with the oaken

club appear, that the spectators drew near, and loud laughter went through the circle.

"That is a juggling trick of the traveller," exclaimed Theodulf, contemptuously.

"It is a weapon of defence in a man's hand," retorted the stranger; "thy skull can scarcely be harder than this iron cap."

He spoke to Wolf, who laid an old iron helmet on a pole at the distance of a spear's throw. The stranger measured the distance of the mark, weighed the weapon in his hand, threw it in a curve at the helmet, and sprang with a powerful bound after it. Loud cracked the bursting metal, and yet the club came back again, and again Ingo caught it with a strong hand, and held it on high. A cry of astonishment sounded through the circle, and a curious crowd collected round the shattered helmet.

"Well then," began Theodulf, condescendingly, "thou hast shown us thy usages, try now our practices. Bring hither the horses for the leapers."

First two horses were placed beside each other, head by head and tail by tail. The leaper drew back, and with a short run sprang over. Almost all were successful in the leap, but with three horses only a few succeeded, and Theodulf

alone was able to leap over four, and as he drew back into the crowd behind the horses, he gave a look of challenge to the stranger, and made a gesture with his hand to the attendants. The stranger bowed his head a little, and made the same leap so easily that the field resounded with applause. Then Theodulf called for a fifth horse to be added—a difficult leap seldom accomplished by the most agile. But the Thuringian was irritated, and determined to do the uttermost. He himself disposed the horses differently, that the grey might stand as fifth, then he looked round him, received the acclamations of his friends, and ventured on the mighty leap. He got over, but in coming down he touched the grey with his back. Whilst, however, stepping forward and rejoicing in the hurrahs of the people, a still louder acclamation sounded behind him, and turning round, he saw the stranger, who this time rapidly and easily, without touching, had accomplished the leap. The Thuringian grew pale with rage; he went silently to his place, and endeavoured in vain to suppress the jealousy that shone forth from his eyes. The old men, however, went up to the stranger, and praised his agility, and the old Chief said, “I perceive, stranger, if thy bearing does not deceive

me, that thou art not ignorant of the leap over six horses also, which is called the King's leap, and in which a hero does not succeed in every generation. I saw it once when I was young, but my people never." And he cried aloud, "Bring the sixth horse hither!"

Then there arose a murmur in the circle, and the more distant pressed nearer, whilst the youths hastened to place the horse. But the Princess stepped up to Ingo: she was grieved at the discomfiture of her relation, and said in a low tone to the guest—

"Consider well, Hero; the arrow of the hunter easily hits the mountain cock, when on spreading his wings he raises his voice." But Ingo looked at Irmgard, who was standing in joyful expectation behind her mother, and gave him a friendly smile, and he answered with glowing cheeks—

"Do not be angry with me, Princess. I have been called for; I did not intrude myself into the struggle; unwillingly does a man renounce the offered honour."

He stepped back for the spring, raised himself powerfully in the air, and accomplished the leap, so that all the people shouted; and when he returned, he heeded not the displeased look

of the Princess; he rejoiced that he had succeeded, and that Irngard's face brightened with a rosy tint. The spectators for a long time kept moving about among one another, speaking of the boldness of the stranger, and extolling him, till other objects were placed for the contest of the men. Ingo from thenceforth stood quiet near the Chiefs, and no one called him to a new struggle.

The sun was already sinking, when the Herald approached the Prince, and invited the company to the repast. The men obeyed the call cheerfully; they returned in procession to the house, and ascended the steps to the hall. The Herald and the High Steward walked before them, and arranged each one at the tables in the hall according to his rank and position. This was an anxious task, for every one desired the place that suited him—either at the table of the Chieftain, or near him, and rather on the right side than the left. There was a long row of tables; the seats for the most distinguished had supports for the arms, and those for others of less distinction had high backs; for the younger ones there were good stools. It was difficult to satisfy all with a seat of honour, but the Herald understood his office, and knew how to recommend to many

their places, on account either of their neighbour, or of being near the ladies, or of having a good view of the hall. Nearest to the door were placed the companions of the master of the house, in a long row; there Theodulf had a place of honour; and on the opposite side, but quite below, sat the stranger. Then, when all were sitting in expectation, the cup-bearer entered with the servants, carrying in beautiful wooden goblets the greeting draught; the Host rose, and drank to the good health of the guests, and all stood up and emptied their goblets. Then came the High Steward, with his staff, and behind him a long row of servants, who set the first course on the table; then each one took the knife which he carried by his side, and began the meal vigorously.

In the beginning there was silence among the benches, for the talking of all was interrupted by their hunger, and they only praised in a low tone the abundant care of the Princess; yet the older men, near the Prince, entered into serious conversation; they called to mind the past deeds of heroes, and praised the virtues of their horses. The others listened willingly to their words, while eating.

A nobleman by the side of the Prince began in

a loud voice, "Truly the pleasantest thing to me in summer is just such a high feast as this, where fellow-countrymen greet each other in warlike attire in the green meadows, the greyheads remember their old warlike journeys, and the combat-loving youths show in their games that their strength may at some future day add to the honour of their fathers. The sun shines warm, and the face of the Host smiles upon the guests, the herds of cattle frisk about, and the ears of corn ripen in the south wind; glad is the heart of man at such a time, and he thinks unwillingly of cares. Yet it befits a man, even at his meals, not to lay aside his sword further than his arm can reach, for all life is full of change in the valleys of men; the heavens may soon be covered by a veil of dark grey clouds, and the earth by a garment of white snow; no happiness is lasting on this earth, and each day may bring a new fate. Thus even now news has spread among the people from the land of the Romans; many are anxious concerning it, and in their thoughts ask our Host whether he has received intelligence which it would be well for us to know."

This speech gave the opinion of all, and there was a sound of assent from every table; then there was a great silence.

But the Prince answered cautiously, "We have all heard of the great battle, and are considering whether it will be for our welfare. Yet I do not advise that we forest men, now engaged with our drinking-horns, should cast our eyes downwards with anxious looks. As yet we only know what wanderers bring from foreign lands, perhaps what they themselves have beheld, perhaps uncertain rumour. Therefore our messengers are riding through the forest southwards for new intelligence. We await their return. Then our wise men will examine whether the news deserves that the people should concern themselves about it."

As these words announced that the Host would not give any information concerning the Roman war, there arose a suppressed murmur, and Herr Answald remarked that his guests would gladly have learned more, and were not pleased with his silence.

The Prince therefore gave a quiet sign to the Herald, who stepped forward, and called out with a loud voice, "The sword-dancers approach, and beg for your favour." Then every one was silent, and arranged themselves for the spectacle, and the women rose from their seats.

A piper and bagpiper stepped forward, behind

them twelve dancers, young warriors from the people, and of the Chieftain's household, in white under-dresses, with coloured girdles, and shining swords in their hands; before them walked Wolf as thirteenth, the sword-king, in a red dress. They stopped at the entrance, and saluted, lowering their weapons; then they began the song of the dance, and glided with slow steps up to the open space before the seat of the Chiefs. The sword-king stood in the middle, his twelve comrades encircling him solemnly with raised swords. He gave a sign, the pipers blew, the movements became quicker, half of them bounded to the right in an inner circle, the others placed themselves opposite outside, and each one exchanged with all whom he met sword-strokes according to the rule of the stroke. Then the king dived amongst the shining swords, gliding now to the outer, now to the inner circle; he received and answered with his weapon the strokes of the others. The windings became more skilful, the movements more eager; one after the other turned himself, as in a fight, through the revolving circles of the others. Then they divided themselves into groups, hastening against each other in measure, and with weapons stretched out, till they at the same time, now three and now four, interlaced

themselves into a fighting posture. Suddenly they all lowered their swords in a large circle to the ground, and entwined them in a moment in an artistic plait that looked like a shield. The sword-king stood upon it, and his twelve comrades were able to raise him on the shield of swords from the ground up to their shoulders, where he stood, and with his sword greeted the Prince, the guests, and the ladies. In like manner they let him down slowly to the ground, loosened sword from sword, and began anew to attack one another in a circle, now springing about and exchanging sword-blows quick as lightning. Scarcely could the eye follow the single strokes in the whirl; the bright steel sparkled, and the men swung their bodies under the sharp weapons; the pipes sounded shrill, the bagpipes droned wildly; and sparks darted forth from the swords. Thus was carried on the game of the heroes in the Prince's hall, until the dancers stopped, as if by magic, in the position of fighters, two against two. Then began again the dance-song of the dancers, and making a solemn salute, they glided with slow steps away, and went in procession out of the hall. From the seats there sounded a storm of applause, the guests sprang up in ecstasy, and called out joyful thanks to the dancers.

A nobleman named Rothari, who was near the Prince, rose up, and began.

"I speak as I think; more skilful sword-play have my eyes never seen among other people, and we Thuringians are the most famous upon the earth for such skill. But lower down there, on the bench of the Prince, sits a stranger, powerful in warlike performances. And if I value him according to the capacity which he has shown this day, I would place his seat high among the strong. Yet the Gods divide unequally their gifts; even a stranger who does not know his ancestors may become an honourable warrior. People say that the news of the Roman battle came first into our country from the Prince's house; and when I saw the stranger, I considered him as the messenger; but the throw of the club showed that he belonged to the East. I give the health of the guest in the hall."

Ingo rose and returned thanks. Then Theodulf called out aloud—

"I have seen many leap and swing on soft turf, who forgot higher leaps in the field of battle."

"Thou speakest right," replied Ingo, coldly; "yet jealousy gnaws the soul of many a one because he himself has not sprung highest on the turf."

"The man who bears in front of his body his scars, is esteemed more worthy of honour among us than a leaper," answered Theodulf.

"But I have learnt from the old and wise that it is more glorious to give deep wounds than to bear them."

"Certainly the dignity becomes thee of a Chief before whom his retinue holds the shield against hostile spears, that his rosy countenance may endure for the pleasure of the people," retorted scornfully the Prince's man.

"And I have heard many a one who received a sword-stroke cluck over it like a hen over its egg," replied Ingo, contemptuously.

"The shirt conceals also inglorious wounds, the traces of strokes which have fallen on the back," exclaimed Theodulf, with flaming countenance.

"But I call the malicious tongue inglorious, which taunts the friendly guest in the hall. Methinks such speech is not honourable; false Roman customs do not become the Thuringian."

"Dost thou know so well the customs of the Romans?" called out from another table a wild warrior of Theodulf's kinsfolk; "then thou must also have felt their strokes."

"I have stood in fight against the Roman

warriors," cried out Ingo, forgetting himself. "Ask in their camp after thy kinsman; not every one can give thee an answer who has been near my sword."

Loud cries filled the hall when the stranger betrayed that he had stood against the Romans. "Thou hast spoken well, stranger," was exclaimed on all sides; but again, from another table, "The stranger boasts wrongly of an evil deed; hurrah, hurrah, Theodulf!"

The Prince rose and called out with a powerful voice, "I bid the war-words cease; I admonish all to peace in the festive hall." Then the loud cries ceased, but the strife of opinions continued noisily about all the tables; eyes flamed, and strong hands were raised. During the confusion a youth from the retinue of the Chieftain sprang up the steps, and cried out in the hall, "Volkmar the minstrel rides into the courtyard!"

"He is welcome," exclaimed the Prince. And turning to the seat of the ladies, he continued, "Irmgard, my child, greet thy teacher, and guide him to our table." Thus ordered the prudent Host, to remind the wranglers of the presence of the ladies. His words acted like magic on the boisterous crowd; gloomy countenances became bright, and many a one seized the

mug, and took a deep drink, in order to put an end to his thoughts, and prepare himself for the song of the minstrel. But Irmgard stepped out of the arbour, and walked through the rows of men to the threshold. On the steps of the hall stood crowded together the young men of the village, staring inquisitively into the hall. Irmgard passed through the crowd, and awaited the minstrel in the courtyard, who was preparing himself for the feast, under the verandah. He came up to her with a respectful greeting: he was a man of moderate height and bright eyes; his curly golden hair was streaked with grey; he wore gracefully his overcoat of coloured cloth; his naked arms were adorned with gold circlets; he had a chain around his neck, and a stringed instrument in his hand.

"Thou comest at a good time, Volkmar," the noble maiden exclaimed to him. "They are at strife with each other; it is necessary that thy song should raise their hearts. Make use to-day of thy skill, and if thou canst, sing them something joyful."

"What has disturbed their spirits?" asked the minstrel, who was accustomed to employ his art like a clever doctor. "Is it against the wild household of King Bisino that they are

angry? or do they dispute over the Roman invasion?"

"The young men do not keep the peace," answered the Prince's daughter.

"Is it nothing more?" enquired the minstrel, indifferently. "It would be useless trouble to try to hinder their passages at arms on the green-sward." But when he perceived the serious countenance of the noble maiden, he added, "If they are the madcaps of the house, lady, I fear that my song will not do away with their jealousy. If I could put thy friendly smile into my song, and whisper it in the ear to each one, they would all follow me like lambs. Yet what I bring to-day," he added, changing his tone, "is so terrible that they will certainly forget their quarrel in listening to it. It is a bad addition to a festive meal; yet I must go in and tell them the tale. I do not know whether they will then still desire a song."

"Wilt thou tell them the sorrowful news at the repast?" asked the noble maiden, anxiously; "that will make their spirits heavy, and rouse them to anger."

"Surely thou knowest me," replied the minstrel; "I shall give them only as much as they can bear. Who has the Prince invited to the hall?"

"They are our old country friends."

"Are there strangers among them?"

"No one," answered the noble maiden, hesitatingly, "save a poor wanderer."

"Then be without anxiety," concluded the minstrel; "I know the disposition of our people, and how one must mix their evening drink for them."

Whilst the noble maiden went through a side-door to the harbour, the minstrel entered the hall. As he stood on the threshold a hurrah and greeting echoed again loud from the roof.

With pride Volkmar perceived that he was a favourite; he passed with agile step into the open space before the table of the Chieftain, and bowed low to him and to the Princess.

"A thousand times welcome to thee, thou beloved of the people!" the Prince called out to him; "the birds of our district which departed in the winter have long been singing their summer song; only for the singer of the Heroes have we looked in vain."

"I have not heard the birds in the air announcing the summer. I have only heard the war-hounds of the Gods howling in the wind, and looked at the coloured cloud-bridges on which the Heroes in endless hosts have been carried up

to the Halls of the Gods. I saw the Rhine flowing in red waves, covered with the bodies of men and horses. I beheld the battle-field, and the bloody valley where heaps of the slain lay as food for the ravens, and I know that Kings with fettered limbs are awaiting execution in the Roman camp."

A loud outcry followed these words. "Give us an account, Volkmar ; we listen," said the Prince.

The minstrel passed his fingers over the strings; there was such a stillness in the room that one might have heard the deep breathing of the guests. Then he touched the strings, and began, first relating, then singing with raised voice and melodious cadence, his account of the battle between the Alemanni and the Romans. He gave the name of the Kings and the Kings' children who had gone with the Alemanni over the Rhine against Cæsar, and had in the first instance put the horsemen of Rome to flight, as well as the first rank in the battle. After that he sang, "Behind the second rank of the Roman host Cæsar rode, giving orders from his horse; over him floated as a banner the picture of a dragon—the gigantic reptile with spiral body, the holy battle-sign of the Romans; the reptile was red and purple, and out of its wide-spread jaw proceeded

tongues of flame. And Caesar called the Bavarians and Franks to the front.

“Forward, you German heroes! my Romans cannot stand the assault of the enemy.’ The Herald rode forward, and the Franks, shining brightly, raised themselves from the ground, and arranged their troops. Aimo, son of Arnfried, swung his sword powerfully in front of the battle.”

“That is my brother!” called out one from one of the tables. “Health to Aimo!” was called out from another corner of the hall.

“They marched on in straight line, their white shields adorned with the picture of the bull. Severe was the pressure; as flames of fire along the heath, so did their swords clear the battlefield from the assault of the Alemanni. Once again with fresh vigour sprang forward the Alemanni, the King’s foremost, and again the Romans gave way. Then Caesar ordered up his last troops, which in the Roman army are called by the generals the ‘Thorn-fence.’”

“Archibald!” was called out wildly in the hall; “Eggo!” from another side.

“There stood as leader over a hundred men a Hunic comrade, the Thuringian Archibald, and Eggo, his mother’s son, much experienced in the Roman customs of war. They fixed their knees

firmly on the ground, they covered their bodies with linden shield, and defended themselves with fixed spears as a threefold buckler. Again the Alemanni dashed on; the shields cracked under the strokes of the axe, the spears passed through armour and body, the dead sank in long rows, and over the bodies of the fallen pressed the throng, shield against shield, and breast against breast, like a fight of bulls in an enclosed pen. Then the fortune of war departed from the Alemanni; they were driven backwards, they were dismayed at the heaps of dying comrades. The sun sank, and the chances of the war were gone. The scattered bands fled to the shore of the stream, and behind them stormed the Romans with knife and spear, like a pack of hounds after the deer; the flying people sprang into the Rhine, the conquerors on the bank threw their spears with loud cries into a wild crowd of men and horses, of dead bodies and drowning heroes; the Nixy of the stream stretched his clawing hands around, and drew the heroes into the depths, down to his own abode."

The minstrel stopped. A loud groan passed through the assembly—only a single hurrah sounded in the midst of it; the Prince listened attentively to the outbreak of sorrow and of joy.

Then Volkmar continued, changing the tones of sorrow to a more stirring melody: "Cæsar approached the bank of the river, and looked smiling down on the men in their distress. He called out to his banner-bearer, who carried the dragon, the red monster worked in purple, in which the God of the Romans had placed a victory spell—the death of the enemy, 'Let the dragon float over the stream, that he may show his teeth and flaming tongue to the dying people. High in the air he flies towards the heavenly halls of the dead; when they rise on the cloud-bridge, he will show his teeth; the Roman dragon will stop their journey, they will descend the road to the fishes, down in the darkness to Hela's gate.' Then was the insult revenged by the last hero who withstood the Romans in arms—Ingo, the son of Ingbert, from the land of the Vandals, the King's son, of the race of the Gods. He had fought by the side of King Athanarich, foremost in the fight, terror of the Romans. When the fortune of battle turned, he retreated with his retinue, that had followed him on the war-path from country to country; slowly and angrily, like a growling bear, he retreated to the bank, where at the foot of the rocks the boats lay. There he collected together the women of the

army, the fortune-tellers, and the blood-seers, and compelled them to depart, that the holy mothers might escape the swords of the Romans. The minstrel also he forced into the boat, and he himself, noble-hearted spirit, made a rampart with his body and weapons in front of the place of departure. The rope was loosened, the boats floated on the green flood 'midst the whizzing of Roman spears; the enemy pressed on, and painfully did the little band at the foot of the rock fight the last fight. Then the Hero beheld on the stone above his head the dragon of Cæsar, the grim reptile, and with a bound he broke through the Roman guard; he leapt upon the stone, with bear-like grip he laid hold of the giant who bore the banner, and threw him from the rock. Lifeless the Roman sank in the flood; then lifting the banner, and shouting the battle-cry, the Hero sprang with the dragon down into the stream. A cry of rage yelled from the throats of the Romans: to revenge the bitter shame before the eyes of Cæsar, to slay the daring one, to save the holy token of Rome, men and horses threw themselves madly into the stream; but the victorious Hero dragged the red dragon down into the whirling stream. Yet once more I saw him raise his arm and shake the banner; then I never

saw him more. Cæsar, with troubled mind, caused search to be made along the banks of the stream on both sides. Two days after, a spy on the Alemann bank found far down the broken banner-spear; the enemy's dragon no one brought back. Then did the men return to the banks of the Rhine with resentment in their souls. The victory spell of Cæsar was lost in the stream, and retribution threatened the Roman army. Envoys who came up from the Kattens in order to offer an alliance with the Roman people, stopped on their journey when they learnt the bad omen. The insult of the conqueror was revenged by a strong arm, and King Ingo, the hero, had vanished from man's earth."

The minstrel ceased, and bent his head over his instrument. All was still in the hall as after a death dirge; the men's eyes glistened, and emotion worked in every countenance; but in none more than in the stranger's. When the minstrel had entered, and in passing by him had touched his dress, he had bent his head down, and, as his neighbour Wolf had observed with displeasure, had taken less interest in the account of the minstrel than was fitting for a warrior, and the bench comrades had pointed to him, and exchanged jeering words. But when the minstrel

began about the fight for the dragon, he raised his face, a rosy light flitted over his features, and so beaming and glorified was the look that he cast upon the singer, that those who saw him could not turn their eyes away; the bright curly hair formed a kind of halo round the inspired face; and when the minstrel became silent, he sat motionless.

"Look there, Volkmar!" called out a deep woman's voice, trembling with emotion; and all eyes followed the direction to which Irmgard's hand pointed, who was standing erect in the arbour.

The minstrel rose, and gazed at the stranger. "The Spirit of the stream has given the Hero back!" he exclaimed with terror, yet immediately after he sprang forward. "Blessed is the day on which I behold thee, Hero Ingo, Ingbert's son, thou my preserver, the last fighter in the battle of the Alemanni!"

The guests rose from their seats, the hall resounded with cries of jubilee. The minstrel rushed up to Ingo, bent over his hand, and exclaimed, "I hold thee bodily. Never did my song receive so delightful a reward." Then he led the stranger to the table of the Prince, who with moist eyes hastened up to him.

“Blessed be thou, heroic man ; to-day a heavy burden falls from my heart ; I knew well that the fame of the hero could not be concealed. Be welcome to my house, thou friend from the time of thy father ; remove the chair, boys, that the Prince may join the nobles of my people. Cup-bearer, bring the wine hither ; in feast goblets, with Roman drink bought with Roman gold, we would drink the health of the kingly Hero, son of our Gods.”

III.

OPEN HEARTS.

IN the early morning Irmgard walked through the dewy grass to the forest; a white mist floated over the ground, and hung round the trees like the dress of the water spirits. Out of the mist of the meadows rose the bright figure of the noble maiden; she was singing and shouting, with rosy cheeks and long floating hair, and with a happy heart; thus she passed through the circling clouds like the goddess of the fields. For she had heard and beheld the heroic, and what raises man from the fear of death into the society of the high Gods; all her countrymen had bowed themselves before the heroic power of one who was secretly pleasing to her, and in whom she had more confidence than in any other. She mounted the hill-path, up to a spot where her father's hall was hidden behind the foliage of the trees; there she stood alone between the

forest and the rock; under her roared the water-fall, over her soared the light clouds of the coming day. She stepped upon a stone, and sang to the rocks and to the rushing water the melody of the minstrel, and the words of the song which she had heard in the hall. She gave forth joyfully what had clung to her memory from the skill of Volkmar; and when she came to the leap into the Rhine, it delighted her so much that she sang with enthusiasm—

“Ye wise birds on the trees, messengers of the Gods, and ye little fitchets under the fern bushes, hear it yet again.” And she repeated the words; and as the Hero at last vanished into the stream, his disappearance was so sorrowful to her, that, being full of imagination, she poured out her emotions in words of her own, and sang yet again the lament of the minstrel. Her song echoed from the rocks, above the notes of the forest birds and the soft murmur of the mountain stream.

Then near her a pebble rolled into the brook. She looked to the side from whence it came, and perceived a figure which, veiled in the airy web of the Nixy, leant against the stem of a tree beneath her; the Hero whose honour she had been proclaiming to the woods was standing

bodily close to her, and as she stepped back frightened, she heard his supplicating voice.

“Sing on, O noble maiden, that I may hear from thy lips what makes me happy. Dearer to me are the tones from thy throat than all the skill of Volkmar. For as the minstrel sang, and the hall resounded with the acclamations of the men, I thought ever on thee, and my proudest pleasure was, that thou heardest the news.”

“In terror at sight of thee, words fail me,” answered Irmgard, endeavouring to compose herself as he drew nearer to her. “I had more courage to speak to thee under the elder tree,” she continued at last; “even then, O Hero, thou hadst little need of my counsel; and when I think of it, I cannot but wonder at my folly: do not thou, therefore, deride me. For just in that way we forest people speak out, and our thoughts are very simple. But it grieves me that thou shouldst twice have heard from my mouth what thou already knewest; had I known thee as thou art, I should have known better how to conceal my good opinion; and now shame oppresses me, because thou hast listened to me.”

“Conceal nothing from me, Irmgard,” implored the guest; “if thou art favourably disposed towards me, then, believe me, seldom has a banished

man heard such hearty words from the lips of a kind woman. Even when the minstrel praised him, and the Host drank to him, still he stood shut out from family and friendship. Seldom does a chief grant to an outcast his daughter as wife, and the fugitive leaves no son on the earth to extol his deeds."

Irmgard looked down seriously. "But do thou," continued Ingo, "suffer me to acknowledge the secret that I bear in my soul. Do not despise my confidence; sit here on the stone, that I may impart it to thee."

Irmgard seated herself obediently; the man stood before her, and began. "Hear from me what happened after the battle of the Alemanni. The stars were shining; I lay deadly weary on the gravelly bank of the stream, the red banner of the Romans wound round my feeble arm. The night wind groaned the death lament, the waves roared, my body was cold, and my brain dizzy. Then a sorrowful face bent over me; it was the fortune-teller of the Alemanni, a wise woman, the confidant of the Gods. 'I seek thee, Ingo, among the bodies of men, that I may preserve thy life, as thou hast done mine.' She conveyed me away from the bank, spread a warm covering over my limbs, and offered me a strengthening drink; after that

she tore the long spear from the foreign banner, and with prayers threw the broken stick back into the stream. She concealed the weary man in the thicket of the forest, and sat by his bed like a mother night and day. On my departure she seized the purple token, and said, 'Here I show thee the threads which govern thy fate; the Gods leave the choice to the Hero. If thou throw from thee the spell spun by the Romans, thou mayest grow old in peaceful quiet, concealed among the people, patient in life, and free from fate. Yet if thou keep the purple figure with malicious eyes and fiery tongue, then, though the minstrel may sing thy praise among the warriors, and thy memory may live long among others, I fear that the dragon will consume thy fortune and body. Choose now, Ingo; for the Gods grant to man his fate according to his own thoughts, and from his own deeds his lot falls—the heavy and the light; as he throws, so will be his fate.' Then I said, 'Long ago, dear mother, have the Gods and the deeds of my ancestors cast for me my earthly lot. From the Gods I came upon man's earth; inglorious repose on soft furs I may not choose; thou knowest it thyself: to tread with my comrades in front of the battle, to lead up the men of the earth to the cloud-hall of Heroes,—that is my duty. If I

am a stranger among foreign races, yet I fear not the directing finger of the Fates; with a firm heart will I tread among the Heroes, I will joyfully trust to my man's courage. If the dragon bring me hatred, renown will procure me friends; never will I conceal my head from the light of the sun.' Then the mother took the purple in her hand; she divided the heads of the dragon from the spiral body; the heads she kept, the body she threw into the flames of the hearth. 'Perhaps I may thus redeem thy days from the threatening evil,' she said, standing by the hearth. The flames rose up high; discoloured exhalations filled the room. She rushed out, and dragged me into the open air. Then she bound the heads with flexible willow, tied the knots, whispered a song, and offered me the bundle in a leathern pocket, that I might keep it secret from every one. 'It will protect from water, but not from fire; thy life I commend to the keeping of the Gods.' Then she directed me northwards, with a blessing on my journey.

"This, noble lady, is the secret of my life, which I tell you willingly. What the Gods may ordain for me, I know not, but I have confided to thee what none other knows. For since I came into this land, and have beheld thee, my mind is altered, and it appears to me better to

sit near thee, or to ride on horseback over the plain, than to go with the vulture to the tumult of battle. My thoughts are much changed, and my spirit is greatly depressed, because I am an unsettled man, who formerly cared little for my fate, and trusted in my arm and in a propitious God, who might, perhaps, some day recall the banished man to his old home. But now I see that I am driven about like this pine branch, with its clod in the running stream."

He pointed to a young pine tree, which was torn away with its moss and earth from the place where it stood by the mountain stream, and was driven erect through the whirling water. "The clod will become smaller," said Ingo, seriously; "the earth breaks away, and at last it disappears among the stones." Irmgard rose, and followed with eager look the path of the wild plant; it went down the valley, twisted itself in the eddy, and hastened forwards, till what with mist and flood it became almost invisible.

"It stops," she exclaimed at last, joyfully, and sprang down to the brook, to the place where the tree had riveted itself into a projecting tongue of land. "See here!" she called out to her companion; "here it bears leaves, on our bank; it is very possible that it may grow firmly on our land."

"But do thou," cried Ingo, transported, "tell me whether that would be pleasant to thee."

Irmgard remained silent.

Then the sun broke out above the wall of clouds; its rays illuminated the noble figure of the maiden; her hair shone like gold around her head and shoulders, as she, with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, stood before the man. His heart bounded with joy and love; he approached her respectfully; she remained as if spell-bound, but moved her hand gently, as if to ward him off, and murmured beseechingly, "The dear sun looks down on us." But he kissed her heartily, and called out to the laughing sun—

"A greeting to thee, bright lord of the day! Be gracious to us, and guard confidentially what thou beholdest."

He kissed her again, and felt her warm lips against his; but when he wished to embrace her, Irmgard removed his arm. She looked at him with deep love, but her cheeks were pale, and she dismissed him with a movement of her hand towards the mountains. He obeyed, and sprang from her, and as he turned to look back at her, he saw her, enveloped in light, throw herself down upon her knees before the tree, and hold up her arms imploringly to the shining heaven.

On the same morning the nobles and wise men, the leaders of the community, and trusty warriors, assembled in the house of Prince Answald, and sat down on the seats which were arranged for them on both sides of the hearth. The Host took his seat in the middle, and behind his chair stood Theodulf. The Herald closed the door, and the Prince spoke to the assembly.

“Ingo, the son of King Ingbert, has come to my house, bound to me by ties of friendly hospitality from the time of his father. To-day I desire for him the right of guest of the people, that he may be safe from enemies, either foreign or among our people, not only in my house, but also in your land ; that he may find justice against evil-doers, and protection by the weapons of the neighbours from every one that would injure his honour or life. As a suppliant I stand before you for the worthy man ; with you it rests to grant or refuse.”

After these words a deep silence ensued. At last Isanbart rose ; his snow-white hair hung about his scarred face, his tall figure supported itself on a staff, but the voice of the old man sounded powerfully, and the men listened to him respectfully.

“It becomes thee, Prince, to speak as thou hast

done. We are accustomed to thy gifts to the people; and when thou beggest something of them, our hearts are ready to grant it. Renowned is the man; and that it is himself, and not a lying traveller, we have the warrant of the minstrel's song, the hospitable token that he has exchanged with his Host, and above all else, the dignity of his countenance and figure. But we are placed as guardians over the welfare of many, and the anxious times admonish us to be cautious; therefore it becomes us to take earnest counsel, and to balance the opinions of the heroes of the people, which are somewhat discordantly divided."

He seated himself, and the neighbours nodded to him respectfully. But Rothari rose up impetuously—a nobleman of the old princely race, a stout man with red face and red hair, a renowned drinker, valiant also in the men's war exercises, and brisk in the dance; the boys called him, in banter, "King Puff-cheek."

"Counsel in the morning should be like an early draught, short and strong. Methinks that there is no need for long consideration here; we have all lately drank his health, we will not to-day pour water into his cup; he is a hero who has two good warranties—the song of the minstrel,

and our good pleasure ; that is enough for me ; I give him my voice for the rights of a guest."

The old men smiled at the zeal of the loyal man, and the younger ones expressed loudly their approbation. Then stood up Sintram, uncle to Theodulf, a man without eyebrows, with pale eyes and thin face, a hard Host, and dangerous to his enemies, yet clever in counsel, and in great consideration at the court of the King.

"Thou, O Prince, art favourably disposed towards him, and he himself deserves it, so thou sayest ; this gives a tendency to my wishes, and I would willingly greet him as a guest, as we at times do to foreign wanderers whose praise has not been proclaimed by the voice of the minstrel ; yet a doubt restrains the wishes of my heart, and I ask, does he come as our friend from a foreign land ? All the young warriors of our province do not stay by their hearths at home. I think also of those who go abroad after fame and fortune. Which of our race has fought with the Alemanni ? I know of none. But in the army of the Romans there are bold swordsmen of our kindred ; if these are enemies of the stranger, how can we call ourselves his friends ? Have they fallen in fight ?—then the death-lament sounds in our villages. Who has caused their fall ?

Perhaps this man, so bold in battle, who himself boasted of it at the feast. How can we offer the rights of hospitality to an enemy, who as an enemy has spilt our blood? I know not whether he did it; but if he did not, it was an accident: it was his object, as he was fighting for King Athanarich. I hear it reported in the Roman army that Cæsar has to thank our fellow-countrymen, who speak our language, alone for his victory; like giants stood the red-cheeked sons of our land above the black-eyed foreigners. Cæsar rewards them with armlets and honours and the highest offices. Ask concerning a powerful warrior and proud army in Rome: the Roman traders will answer, with an envious look, they are of German blood. Where shall our youths find war-honours and the favours of the Gods, if their weapons rust peacefully in the land? Where should the strength of our province go, enabling their brothers at home to enjoy the inheritance, if Cæsar did not open his treasure-house to wanderers? Therefore, I say, his kingdom is useful to us, and whoever fights against him is opposed to our advantage; look to it that the stranger does not bar the path which leads our high-minded heroes to gold treasure and honour."

The men sat with gloomy looks; it was a sorrow

to them that he spoke the truth. But Bero, the father of Frida, broke the silence—a raw-boned peasant, who knitted his bushy eyebrows with displeasure. “Thou sentest thy brother into the Roman army”—he spoke with a rough voice, and slowly—“thou sittest comfortably on his inheritance; I am not surprised that thou praisest the foreign brood. But the peasant does not delight in the insolent fellows who return home from their war-travels out of the Roman land, for they become bad companions, despisers of our customs, boasters, and loiterers. Therefore I say that Roman travels are a misfortune to our people. If our young warriors serve in the camp of foreign Generals, they do it at their own risk; the people have not chosen nor dedicated them to it. I can boast of a home of my own, where I can wield my axe freely; also I am at peace with my neighbours who honour my Gods and my language. Now we have peace with every one. If an Alemann comes to our hearth, a valiant fellow, we give him a bed by our fire; if on the morrow a Roman warrior comes, who appears to us honourable, we perhaps do the same. Both must live discreetly, according to our laws; and should one grudge the other the air and the hearth-fire, let them take their swords and fight out their quarrel

outside the village fence; the blows are their affair, not ours. Therefore, I say, here is an heroic man; whether Roman or Vandal, let him be welcome to our hearths; we will be the Hosts, and restrain him if he should disturb the peace of the land."

He spoke, and seated himself defiantly on his stool; the old men murmured assent. Then rose Albwin, a man of noble nature. It is said that the house-spirit dwells in the rafter-roof of his house, from the times of his fathers, and rocks the children of the family in the night, and that on this account they do not grow up like other men; for all his family are delicate and small, yet pleasant in disposition, and powerful in good words. And he spoke thus: "Perhaps thou thyself, O Prince, mayest be able to reconcile the opinions of the chiefs and neighbours. They all would grant the best to the Hero who came to thy hearth from the war; they are only fearful lest, perhaps, at some time their countrymen should be troubled by his fate. For it is characteristic of an illustrious man not to lie idle under the roof of his Host; he collects followers around him, and creates himself opponents: the greater a man's repute, the more powerfully will he draw his companions in his path. We are not so niggardly

as to count the days during which we should keep a wanderer in the hall, yet we do not know the views of the Hero; and therefore may it be permitted to me to ask the Host. If it is only a question of giving the stranger a short rest and a chamber, then there is no need of consultation. But if he wishes to pass his future days among our people, to fix his abode on our ground, then we must think cautiously, not only of the advantage of the stranger, but also of our own."

"Thy admonition is well founded," answered the Prince, seriously, "and yet I must refuse an answer to thy speech; thou thyself knowest that it does not become a Host to watch the hour of departure of a guest; and even if I might, in this case I would never do it, for the noble man came to us from misfortune; he himself knows not whether his return will be granted to him soon, or perhaps ever."

Again Rothari rose, the unyielding man, and spoke in anger. "What! shall we market about time, we Thuringians? When we open our hearts, we do not make a question of time. Give him the rights of hospitality among the people, and make an end of it!"

Loud cries of applause rose from the men, who sprang from their seats. Then jumped up Sin-

cram in the middle of the circle, and cried out with sharp voice to the excited assembly, "Look to it, Prince, that the leaders of our province do not, like a boy following a bright bird, spring down into an unexplored chasm. I demand silence: little has yet been considered which tends to our welfare."

The Prince made a sign with his staff; the men seated themselves unwillingly, and a threatening murmur rose against Sintram; but he continued, unmoved: "Powerful art thou, O Prince, and sharp is the iron of thy people, but we are Thuringians, and a King rules over us; it is fitting that the King should give hospitality to the foreign king's son, not we."

"King Bisino? King Bilberry!" cried angry voices. "Will Sintram have us send a messenger to the King to prescribe the promises that we are to make by our hearth-fires?" exclaimed an indignant Thuringian.

"The King is our liege lord," said Herr Answald, cautiously. "In the council of the people his name should be mentioned with respect."

"I know well," the persistent Sintram called out to the threatening assembly, "that we do not ask the King when a way-weary man, of whose name no one has heard, sits down on our bench; but he who has now come is a noted warrior—an

enemy of the Romans. We know not the King's mind, whether the stranger might be useful or mischievous to him; and whether he who considers the peace of the people, would praise or blame our hospitality."

Then rose Turibert, the priest of the sacrifices, who sat on the right hand of the Prince, and began with a loud voice, which sounded powerfully under the raftered roof. "Thou askest whether the King would graciously approve, or turn his face angrily away. I do not blame thine anxiety; many a one asks how the hare runs, and what the owl cries. But I tell you what is known to men without any prognostics. The Gods of mankind have consecrated a law for us, that we should grant air and light, earth and water, to the innocent stranger. If the King is angry because we behave honourably to a suppliant, we must bear it; for heavier is the anger of the Gods than the displeasure of a king. If this man is an enemy to you because he has fought the Romans, then extinguish forthwith the hearth-fire at which he sits down, and lead him away beyond the boundary forest. But to consider whether he may perhaps become dangerous, or perhaps not, is not the custom of the country, nor the command of the Gods."

"Listen to his words," began Isanbart again. "I saw my sons fall in the thick of the battle; my grandsons also have vanished from man's earth; I know not why I have remained behind in the struggle betwixt night and day, betwixt summer and winter, and betwixt love and anger in the souls of men. But perhaps the Powers have preserved me here, that I might give to the younger men an account of the fate of their fathers. In the former times, so the old men told me, all Thuringians built upon their own fields as free men, in a confederacy of the provinces. But discord came among the people; those in the northern province struggled unsuccessfully against the knives of the Saxons. Then the northern province chose for themselves a King; they placed him on a high seat, and put a diadem round the head of a hero whose fame as a warrior was renowned; and the race of Princes became powerful. From the quarries of the plain they built a castle of stone, and collected warriors of the people within the walls. But our ancestors, forest men, sat independent on the inheritance of their fathers, impatient of the King's sway. Long did the strife last between our province and the King's men. When the King's hosts invaded our boundary fence we drove

our herds into the woods, and saw indignantly how these valley people set our houses in flames ; we sat behind the barricade, and counted the days, till we could exercise reprisals on the herds and warriors of the King. At last the King offered an amicable compromise. I was a boy when the people of our province first bowed their necks before the King's red diadem. Since then we have sent our young men to his wars, and in return the King's men come into our ranks when our province is at war with the community of the Kattens. Impatiently does the King bear our lukewarm homage ; often have his messengers endeavoured to set a price on our herds, and to count the sheaves on our acres. More than once in our lifetime has the quarrel with the King's people blazed up ; the common advantage has compelled them again to peace, but the counsellors of the King spy jealously from the battlements of the castle at our free forests. Now we still live unscathed ; rings and dresses come from the King's castle for the persons of our nobles, and our fellow-countrymen are received with loud greetings in the King's halls. Yet I warn you that we are not pliant, nor accustomed to the princely service ; we ask for nothing, therefore King Bisino sends us no answers ;

we do not supplicate him as a master, therefore he grants us no favours. Every pretext to show power is welcome at the King's court. Whether the King's people like or dislike the stranger, if we ask them, it does us a mischief; if to-day we enquire about our rights of hospitality, and beg for permission, on the morrow we shall have a King's messenger with commands. Therefore it seems to me better that we should remain as we have done. To give content to our guest is our right, not the right of the King. Thus be it ended. When I was a man in my full strength, I was travelling companion to the father of our Host. I stood in the battle by the sword-hand of that Hero whose son now tarries at our hearth. A mild man, but proud and strong, was the father, and I see the son is of the same stamp. When lately I found the young Hero at the games, then did my dream of the olden time revive; I saw a friend's eye, not that of a stranger; the hand of the king, which I once touched in a foreign country, I touched anew now; and therefore I desire to gain for him the good-will of the people, the seat at our bench."

The old man sat down again slowly, but round the hearth sounded a loud acclamation, and swords rattled in their sheaths. "All hail to Isanbart!

hail to Ingo! We give him the rights of hospitality!"

The Prince arose, and closed the council. "I thank our friends and countrymen; let what has been transacted here be told and done, and let no one bear rancour for past words; for it becomes the Chiefs of the people to make a unanimous decision, that in the community of the province there may be no doubt or discord to disturb the peace."

Prince Answald went from man to man, and shook hands with each one; Sintram also shook hands, and smiled confidingly, when the Prince looked at him; but Rothari gave a shake of the hand that resounded, and exclaimed at the same time, "It rejoices me;" and with these words of the excitable man a smile passed over the serious faces. The Herald opened the door, and the heroes stepped with dignity out of the house on to the meadow, where the circle of their fellow-countrymen were assembled. Then the people's hospitality was accorded to the stranger amidst the acclamations of the multitude; they invited him into their circle, and led him afterwards, according to holy custom, to the great hearth-kettle of the Prince. Over the kettle the Chiefs of the people and Ingo exchanged vows.

Then the Prince began to the guest, "The alliance is sworn, and a place shall be prepared for thee in my court, Hero Ingo, that thou mayest have an apartment therein so long as pleaseth thee. But thou thyself must appoint a chamberlain; choose among my retainers any one whom thou likest, only I should be unwilling to give up Hildebrand the Herald, or Theodulf, who is himself of noble race. The others will every one esteem it an honour to give thee an oath of fidelity, and to follow thy footsteps so long as thou tarriest amongst us, especially when they learn it is agreeable to me."

Then Ingo approached Wolf, and said, "Thou wast the first to offer the stranger bread and salt at the boundary of the country, and thou hast shown thyself friendly to me ever since. Wilt thou venture to be the companion of a banished man? I have no other treasury but the forest and the heath, if your Prince permits me to seek booty there, and the battle-field with the armlets of slain enemies; thou wilt have to follow a poor lord, and no other reward can I offer thee than kind feeling and help with spear and shield."

Wolf answered, "Teach me, O my lord, to attain thy skill in the battle-field, then am I sure to gain golden treasure, if the Gods will permit

that I should endure in the fight; yet if they invite thee to their halls, I know that the path along which I follow thee will be full of fame to me also."

He spoke, and made his vow to the guest upon his hand. Theodulf also sought reconciliation with Ingo. On the evening of the feast, when the Prince had taken the Hero to the seat of honour, Sintram, with other men of Theodulf's kindred had met together. They had secretly taken counsel how to hinder a fight between the opponents, and Theodulf had, in consequence, followed by his kinsfolk, gone to Ingo, and had said, "The aspect of the country appears different when the sun breaks out from behind the clouds. Thus I did not know thy value when I spoke ungraciously to thee. My speech did not refer to thee, but to an inglorious man who has now vanished; do thou forget, therefore, the wounding words, that I may not be the only one in the hall to whom thou wouldst have a right to bear rancour."

And the Prince added, "He speaks rightly; none of us here now wish thee evil, Hero. I myself desire a reconciliation for him, for it was I who concealed thy name."

Then answered Ingo, "The words of contempt

I forgot, Theodulf, during the song of the minstrel ; unwillingly would I think of any further revenge."

In golden splendour rose a new morning for Ingo. But in the mountain forest a hot morning is followed by a stormy day, and even warmth of heart disappears quickly in the storm of angry thoughts.

IV.

AT THE KING'S COURT.

AT the castle of the King of Thuringia sat Gisela, the Queen, on a high seat; she supported her head on her white arm, and her long curls fell from under her diadem over her hand, covering her eyes. At her feet a servant-maid was putting back into the chest the gold vessels from the King's table, and counting the pieces before she closed and delivered it into the treasure-room of her royal mistress. She gazed smilingly at her face distorted in the round metal, and looked up to her lady; but the Queen concerned herself little about the golden treasure. Some steps off sat King Bisino, a valiant warrior, of bulky figure, with strong limbs and a broad face; he had on his cheek a black mole, which was hereditary in his race; it had been a cause of derision to one of his ancestors, but was now considered a king's token; it did not add to his beauty, but he was

proud of it. The King was cross-looking; copious drinking had swollen the veins of his forehead. He was wrangling with the minstrel Volkmar, who was standing before him.

"I have sent for thee after the repast," said the King, "that the Queen may question thee, but she appears not to know that we are here."

"What does my lord command?" asked Frau Gisela, raising herself up proudly.

"There is good reason," murmured the King, "to open one's eyes, when the Kings wear iron fetters by the Rhine, and lie in damp prisons."

"Why did they offer their hands to the fetters?" replied Gisela, coldly. "It ill becomes those who have led thousands of their warriors to the death-halls to allow others the precedence. When I see valiant men with death-wounds on the bloody heath, I concern myself little about the bloodless faces in prison."

"Fortune abandons even valiant men," said the King, looking timidly at his wife. "But thou, fellow, hast not told all; one of them escaped and came into my country. There have been loud sounds heard in the house of the Prince; acclamations to Ingo have shaken the hall. Thou wast there, nimble-tongued musician; why hast

thou changed thy song? for other were the tones of thy ditty in the forest bower."

"Bad would be the repute of the singer if his song sounded uniformly on one string. My duty is to give every man his due, that the heart of the hearer may open itself joyfully. I did not conceal the name of the hero from the King, for deeds of renown live through my mouth. But I did not know that the name of the fugitive would disturb the mind of the great ruler of the people."

"I know thee," exclaimed the King, with an outbreak of anger; "thou divest with agility, like the otter in the river. Guard thy smooth skin from the strokes of my boys."

"The minstrel is at peace with the wild folk. Thy boys, O King—the insolent men whose noise sounds now from the court up to the stone tower—have fear also of the minstrel; for he carries tidings of every misdeed through all countries; and were his mouth to be for ever stopped, then his valiant comrades would revenge his death. Thine anger does not frighten me, yet I should be unwilling to lose thy favour, for thou hast richly rewarded my true service. It is impossible for me to know why my lord hears with such displeasure the name of the stranger; the fugi-

tive appears to me a valiant man, faithful to his friends, and not greedy after foreign goods."

"Thou speakest as befits thee," said the Queen, kindly, "and the King knows well thy value. Take for thy news, even though it should be unpleasant, the reward of a king's messenger." She made a sign to her serving-maid, who pushed the heavy chest in front of her feet; she put her hand in, and without making a choice, offered to the minstrel a gold drinking-vessel. The minstrel looked at her startled, but seeing the Queen knit her brows angrily, he took the cup which she reached him, and bowed low upon her hand.

"If thy rapid foot can tarry with us yet a while, do thou teach my maidens the new dance melody, which thou broughtest the last time to our hall. And afterwards come where thou wilt be near me."

She gave him a gracious sign to depart. The King looked after him with a dissatisfied air.

"Thou art liberal with the gold out of thy chest," he said, sulkily.

"The King makes a good bargain when he can by gold repair the injustice that he has done to an inferior. It is little to the honour of my lord to betray his anxieties to the travelling man who

sings from hall to hall for pay. Thou hast only the choice of closing the mouth of the man by a cup, or for ever by a stroke of the sword; therefore I gave him the cup to propitiate him, that he might be silent; for he is a far-famed man, and it would be dangerous to kill the witness of thy fear."

The King continued dejectedly, terrified, as often happened to him, by the proud spirit of the Queen, "What dost thou advise with respect to the stranger, whom the forest people have received as a friendly guest as a defiance to me? Shall I offer him also gold, or iron?"

"Thy favour, King Bisino; for Ingo, the son of Ingbert, is an illustrious man."

"Is it to my advantage that he can make the king's leap?" asked the King again.

Frau Gisela looked at him, and remained silent. "Confidence alone binds a noble mind," she replied at last, and stood before the King. "If my lord would avoid danger, let him invite the stranger himself to his court, and show him the honour due to him. The King's son may be dangerous, perhaps, among the peasants of the forest, but not in thy castle, and in the midst of thy army; here, as thy friendly guest, his oath and thy power will bind him."

The King reflected. "Thou advisest well, Gisela, and thou knowest I respect thy words. I will await what the future brings." He rose; the Queen made a sign to the maiden to leave her.

When she was alone, she paced up and down the room with rapid steps. "I am called Gisela; I am fettered in a foreign land to the joyless bed of a low-minded man. For years has the daughter of the King of Burgundy sat in misery on the throne, and her thoughts return to the land of her own people, and to the time of her childhood. There I saw him whom once my father destined for my husband, when I was a child and he was a boy. Ingo, the banished man, hard was thy travelling fare, and bitter thy drink in thy banishment, but bitterer yet is my grief in the King's castle! Whenever a wandering warrior came from foreign lands, I enquired after thy lot. Now thy steps approach the path along which I tread, be thou welcome to me, whether for weal or woe; for I am weary of my solitude."

From without sounded the laughter of many voices, and the song of the maidens; the Queen sat down, her hands clasped upon her knees, and listened to the melody of the dance, which the minstrel sang. Later the serving-maid led the minstrel quietly in. "Thou hast related much at

the King's repast," said she to him, smiling, "which has given my lord heavy thoughts. Now let me know in confidence how thou thyself didst escape the bands of the Romans; for I was in danger of losing a worthy man, who has often given me pleasure. If thou hast a song concerning thine own troubles, I will listen to it."

"I thought little of myself at that hour, Princess; I looked after another who saved me, and put himself in the greatest danger."

"I think that was this stranger," said the Queen. "Begin thy song, and lower thy voice if thou canst, that idle people may not throng to the door."

Volkmar began in a low voice his account of the escape to the boat, and the leap into the Rhine. The golden rays of the evening sun glanced through the small open window, encircling the form of the minstrel, who, in deep excitement, sang softly the emotions of his heart. The Queen sat in the shadow, and again her heavy tresses fell over the hand which supported her bent head; immoveable she sat, absorbed within herself, till the minstrel concluded with his recognition in the hall.

"That will be a song glorious for both—both for him and thee," said the Queen, graciously, when the minstrel ceased. "Thou goest with the blessing

of the Gods to hall and hearth, that the news may be spread among the people."

The King sat at the evening carouse among his attendants; the shouts and laughter of his body-guard sounded round the hearth; from large glasses and goblets they quaffed the spicy drink. "Play us the dance, minstrel," cried one of the wild fellows, "which thou hast taught to-day to the King's maidens, so that we also may dance skilfully to the melody on the heath."

"Let him alone," said Hadubard, mockingly, a scarred warrior who had been a halberdier at the Roman court, and now served the King. "His song is just good enough for the cranes to hop to in the poultry-yard. He who has beheld the dancers, the smiling maidens from Alexandria, thinks the step of the peasant on the grass like the march of geese."

"He has become proud," cried out another, "since he has concealed in his dress the gold cup of the Queen. Be on thy guard, Volkmar; insecure is golden treasure with the travelling man who goes over the heath."

"Wolfgang is thy name," replied the minstrel, "and like a wolf thou goest lurking over the heath. Ill does thy envious look on the Queen's gift befit the bench of the King."

He took his instrument in his hand, touched the strings, and sang the melody of the dance. Then the men began to move their limbs; they beat time with their hands on the table, and stamped the step with their feet; the King also, elevated with wine, clapped his hand on the cover of the wine bottle, and nodded his head. But at the second verse the boys, excited with mead, rose up; only the old men kept seated, and clasped firmly in their hands their drinking-horns, while the others, following each other in couples, danced round the bench, so that the noise was great in the hall. The King laughed.

“Thou knowest well how to subdue them,” he exclaimed to the minstrel. “Come near, Volkmar, thou crafty-tongued man; sit near me, that I may confide to thee my opinion. I was ill-tempered to-day; I did not intend ill, but thy news lay heavy upon my soul. However, as concerns the golden cup that the Queen has bestowed upon thee, what my old boy said to thee was not wrong. Gold is a royal metal, and is not fitting for the travelling-bag of an inferior man; thou thyself singest that it is productive of evil to human beings. Thou wouldst act wisely if thou shouldst quite quietly and with a willing heart give me back this booty, to place in the treasure-house.”

Willingly would the minstrel have kept the beautiful cup ; and he answered, " What the eye of the master covets will do no good to the servant ; yet bethink thee, Prince, the piece which has occasioned sorrow and envy to the man who has lost it will bring a curse into the King's treasury."

" Have no anxiety about that," replied the King ; " to me it is nothing."

" But when the Queen learns that I have so little valued her gift, she will justly be angry with me," said the minstrel.

" She will scarcely know it, Volkmar, believe me," continued the King, persuasively. " It is all alike to her whether it is gold or copper. When in autumn the forest people send their horses to my court, thou mayest look out for thyself a good one with round hoofs, and my chamberlain shall give thee a beautiful dress out of the chest, which will give thee more dignity among the people ; than the round bit of plate. For I mean well by thee, Volkmar ; I fear for thee the envy of my attendants."

" I have heard disorderly words at the hearth of the King," replied the minstrel, vexed.

" Do not take it amiss, Volkmar," exclaimed the King, soothingly ; " it is true their speech is

sometimes wild, and I have difficulty in restraining their violence, but the art of a King is to use every one in his own line. For gold and a warm seat at my bench they do quickly, as King's messengers, all that I choose, asking no questions, whether the deed is bloody or not. How can a King govern a people without such servants? For the minds of men are proud; every one will do only what pleases him, every one stands on his own rights, and seeks his own revenge, and no one yields to the will of others. Every one desires fighting and wounds for his own reputation, and is in haste to go up to the Gods. I mean some time also, at last, to ask for a seat in the hall of the Gods. But I would rather, while on this earth, rule over pliant men; and if I must remove men from the light because they are dangerous to me, it is but a few; but to preserve the others in their inheritance is for my advantage and my glory: think thereon, Volkmar, because thou art a sensible man. The people are insolent, and their minds puffed up, but the King's care is to think of everything that is good for the country. Therefore do not blame my faithful ones. It is better that they should sometimes commit a crime in self-defence than that all the rest should meditate evil against one another, and that the

people of Thuringia should have to yield bondsmen's service to a foreign race."

The minstrel remained silent. The King continued, warily, "The wine has opened my heart, and I will speak to thee as to a friend. Tell me, as one would to a brother, what kind of man is the stranger? I would gladly trust him, but he is of that unyielding race who boast that once a God lay in the marriage-bed of their grandmother. The race is of little use on this earth; their blood has become dark, like old mead in pitchy jugs; they make a great blustering among the people, they bear themselves as if they were the cousins of the God of war, and regard the lot of all others like the chaff which they blow before them. Is the stranger such a fellow?"

"It appears to me that his spirit is cheerful and his nature careless, only a heavy fate attends him," replied Volkmar.

"How does he behave himself with the wine-cup?" asked the King. "I like a red-cheeked lad who opens his throat for his drink."

"He knows how to give a good account of himself in drinking and in speech," replied the minstrel.

"Then he shall be welcome to me on my hearth," exclaimed the King, tapping his drinking-

cup. "But I have chosen thee as a trusty messenger, that thou mayest bring me the stranger from the forest bower to my castle; bring him before my face."

Volkmar rose, and stood reflecting. "I will give thy message to the stranger; yet that he may learn the well-considered intentions of my lord, I beg my King will first promise him peace and safe conduct, to the court and from the court—my King, and his boys in the hall."

"What dost thou imagine, minstrel?" cried the King, with an outburst of displeasure; "how can I give a promise to a wild stranger, whose intentions I do not know?"

"Yet thou wishest, O my lord, that he should yield himself into thy hands. It is easy to demand an oath from an individual. My lord would himself consider the stranger a fool if he ventured here among your boys, without a surety of peace."

"Why does my King need a wandering minstrel for such a message?" cried out Wolfgang; "let him send us, and we will bring the stranger, either on his feet or on his shield; we have long wished to pay a visit to the villages of these insolent peasants."

"Silence," said the King; "I need not your

rude tongue when I have to deal with my forest people. Volkmar shall be my messenger, for to-day is a day of good words; when there comes a day for hard deeds, then I will call upon thee.

"So thou thinkest he will not be such a fool?" he asked, scowlingly, and from his moist eyes broke forth a fiery look like a flash of fire from out of a wet cloud; but he restrained himself, and continued good-humouredly, "Well, I will promise him all. And you, silence there!" he cried out, raising his voice above the noise of his men. "Come in, and promise on my hand peace for Ingo, the son of Ingbert, to the court, at the court, and from the court."

The men took the oath. "And now, minstrel," continued the King, threateningly, "I lay it on thy conscience to bring him here without delay."

"I am only thy messenger, my lord; I cannot compel him."

"Think of thine own safety, Volkmar," cried the King, raising his clenched fist on high. "It would be bad for thee if thou shouldst be obliged in the future to avoid thy native land."

"I will behave myself as a true messenger," replied the minstrel, earnestly.

"All right, then, Volkmar," concluded the King, appeased and rising. "Let the drinking be ended ;

break up from your seats; and thou, Volkmar, shalt to-day accompany me instead of my chamberlain." The King supported himself heavily upon Volkmar's shoulder, and walked with him across the court to the apartment of the Queen. On the way he whispered to him, in a jocund way, "Now, rogue, where is the cup?"

Volkmar opened the bag which he carried on his girdle, and offered the gold vessel to the King.

"Put it into my dress," said the King; "I will, for thy sake, take care that Frau Gisela shall not see the thing."

On the following morning the minstrel left the castle. The King looked after his messenger distrustfully, and thought in his own mind, "My forest fox will hardly bring this stranger to my castle; if they refuse my demand, then they will give me a ground for going against them, to break their peasant pride, and make an end of their free confederation. But then they will choose Ingo for their leader, and he appears to me a brave hero, and there might be a hard fight among logwood and forest mushrooms. No one knows what would be the end of it; and I have no wish to make my body a footstool over which another would rise to the throne." Thus, full of anxious care, he drank his mead, concealing his

thoughts even from the Queen, who with her large eyes looked enquiringly at him, and sometimes guessed his thoughts without his expressing them.

Day after day passed, and Ingo did not come. But one evening Sintram, the uncle of Theodulf, knocked at the door. The King received him with open arms, he spoke long and secretly with him, and Frau Gisela remarked that the King gave assurance to the nobleman, with a shake of the hand, "Thy advantage and mine will go together in the forest like two wolves." But as the Hero Sintram departed, the king looked after him also doubtingly, and called him an evil-eyed fox.

V.

IN THE FOREST ARBOUR.

IN the Prince's courtyard and in the village the harvest waggons rattled; the Chieftain's men forgot in the pressure of work their warrior pride, and helped the hinds; the reapers bound the last sheaves for the great God of the people, and brought a garland of ears of corn, dancing in measure, to the Prince's hall. The barefooted village children swarmed like thrushes about the thicket, collecting berries and nuts in long cornets made of wood shavings. Every one was eager to bring home the fruit which the Goddess of the fields bestowed upon the dwellers of the plains. Ingo, by the side of the Master of the house, watched the peaceful work, which he had formerly only beheld from the back of his high war-horse. He heard with annoyance his Host vexing himself like a peasant about the wolves that had killed one of his young bullocks,

but he more often smiled gladly, when he saw ringard among the maidens at their work, to whom she was giving orders. The hearts of Ingo and the noble maiden beat with joy when, in the presence of others, in the house and in the field, they exchanged greetings and sometimes a few words. For strict was the rule of the house; the men lived separately, and Ingo feared, since he had taken the oath of guest, to wound the peace of the house by too bold approaches. Almost all gave him friendly looks; only the eyes of the Princess became clouded when she beheld him. She was vexed by the proud feeling that he had, contrary to her advice, conquered one of her kinsfolk in the warlike games, and that her wish to consider him as a foreign traveller had been frustrated by the minstrel. And there was another thing which was annoying to her. She had chosen Theodulf, her blood-relation, to be the husband of her daughter; Herr Answald and her own kinsfolk had already been in treaty concerning it some years before. Now she observed suspiciously her daughter and the guest.

One day there came a travelling juggler, with his chest, into the field; he played in front of the Prince's courtyard on the bagpipe, till the people of the village came running up; the men also and

servants of the Prince came out of the gate of the courtyard. When the circle was closed, the man began in vulgar language his account—that he concealed in his chest a Roman hero, and if the warriors and beautiful ladies wished to show him their favour, he was ready to exhibit him. He tapped on the chest; the cover rose, and a small hideous monster, with a face like a man, and a Roman helmet over his ears, raised his head up, and made faces. Many drew back, but the more courageous laughed at the wonder. The man opened the chest, and an ape sprang out, dressed in a coat of mail like a Roman warrior. He moved his lank legs about on the grass, turned a somersault in the air, and danced. At first the country people were alarmed, then there arose loud laughter and cries of approbation, so that Hildebrand ran into the arbour, and exclaimed to the Princess, “A juggler is dancing before the gate of the Court, with a small wild man, whom they call an ape.” Thereupon the Prince, with Ingo and the ladies, went out and amused themselves with the frolicsome jumps of the ape. At last the ape took his helmet off, and ran round the circle, while the man cried out—

“Bestow, ye heroes, on my Roman warrior what you have of Roman coin in your purses,

small and great; the nobler the hero, the larger will be the bit of money. Let those who have none place sausages and eggs in the chest."

Then the people laughed, and many put their hands into their belts; others brought from the house what would serve for travelling fare for the man. The stranger went up also to the Prince, and he and Theodulf took Roman copper out of their pockets, and Frida heard Theodulf say to the juggler, pointing to Ingo, "The great Hero there will bestow upon thee most bountifully." When the man with his ape approached the Hero Ingo, Frida was anxious to see whether the stranger and his chamberlain Wolf, in the jerkin of the Princess, would be able to find anything that they could give; and in order to save them from shame she quickly pulled off a small silver bell which the Prince's daughter had given her as a neck ornament, and, springing forward, she said—

"This Hero, who knows better than thou the dancing of the Romans, will bestow something on thee when thou answerest him one question, What dress does thy monster wear when thou cravest gifts among the Romans?"

The man took the silver, looked with fear at Ingo, and answered the maiden insolently, "I

know that the greeting of the Vandals is dangerous and rough ; but I tell thee that he who will please the Romans in the dance must dance naked. What my ape does there I counsel to thee also."

Frida called out to him, angrily, "I suppose that among foreigners thy dancing cat derides the warriors of my people as he does the foreign ones among us."

Then the men nodded, and turned laughing away from the juggler. But Ingo went up to him, and asked, "How knowest thou that I am a Vandal?"

"Thou bearest it clearly enough on thy head," replied the man, pointing to Ingo's cap, in which were placed three wing-feathers of the wild swan. "Scarcely a week has passed since I have suffered among the Burgundians sharp chastisement from thy feathers."

Ingo's countenance changed ; he seized the man hastily by the arm, and took him aside. "How many were there who wore this token?"

"More than ten, and less than thirty," replied the man. "They gave me hard words because my little one there danced with goose's feathers, and they threatened me with blows."

"Was he who chid thee an old warrior, with a grey beard, and a scar upon his forehead?"

"Thou describest him as he was; he had also rude manners."

Iringard saw that the Hero had difficulty in concealing his emotion; he separated himself from the others, and went alone back to the house.

Shortly afterwards, Volkmar, as king's messenger, entered the house. Ingo received him as a friend, whom he had anxiously expected; he heard his message, and led him to the Prince; then the three held confidential council.

"The King has invited me," said Ingo, "and he has promised me safety. Whatever the thought of his heart may be, it becomes me to accept his invitation. Only one thing restrains me, and with shame I speak it out: I ought not to enter the court of the King as a needy man; thou knowest, O my lord, how I came to thee."

The Prince replied, embarrassed, "Horse and dress shall not be wanting to thee, O Hero, and Wolf shall accompany thee as chamberlain; yet I do not advise thee to trust to the words of the King, and venture thyself under the axes of his body-guard, for thou mightest vanish, without a trace, behind the stone walls. This journey would be an inglorious end for a Hero."

Volkmar also spoke: "It becomes thee, Hero

Ingo, to regard danger little; thou knowest, indeed, that boldness sometimes prospers best with a man. But if thou accept the King's invitation, as thou wilt, thou shouldst never go as a single wanderer. To the King and his retinue thou wouldst be contemptible, and unworthy would be thy treatment, even if the King should not attempt thy life. For at Kings' courts it is the style alone that gives distinction to a hero—his stately dresses, horses, and retinue. Therefore before thou goest to the King thou must obtain all these. But if these forest men follow thee, thou wilt be hateful to the King."

"Thou speakest well, Volkmar, in all respects," replied Ingo. "If thou wilt venture thyself back under the eyes of the King, tell him that I am thankful for his royal message, and that I will appear before him as soon as I am equipped as his and my honour demand."

"I will bear the answer," answered Volkmar; "and I hope to be able to spring nimbly aside when he throws his drinking-cup at me."

Herr Answald gave also his assent; for he was secretly annoyed at the demand of the King, though he manfully concealed his anxiety.

When Ingo and Volkmar were alone, Ingo began, "He who has given one piece of good

advice, may probably give a second. Thou seest that I am like a child that has been caught out of the water, and placed newly in the world. Here the people are kind-hearted, but they seldom make warlike expeditions. Look about, thou faithful comrade, and find out where there is respectable work for a good sword."

"Wait only a little," answered Volkmar, laughing; "and meanwhile take pleasure in hearing the noble maid, Irmgard, sing my dance before thee, for she is well practised in song and in my instrument. If I hear of any honourable campaign, thou shalt learn it; but thou knowest that in autumn home entices the warrior; the spring is the time for warlike excursions."

"And now hear further," continued Ingo, "a thought that has come across me as I lay sleepless in the night. The leap into the Rhine separated me from my men; the Roman band dispersed in pursuit of me like a rush of water over a country; the Priestess concealed me with care till she sent me northwards; at my departure she promised to seek my comrades who had stood by me at the boat. Lately I have heard from a travelling juggler, that some warriors of my people have during this month encamped among the Burgundians; one of them, it seems to

me, is Berthar, whom thou knowest. "If thou hast a kindly feeling for me, Volkmar, enquire, when thou canst, concerning my trusty friend; for however well disposed towards me many are who here live around me, I cannot be happy till I know whether any of my comrades have escaped the weapons of the Romans."

The minstrel nodded, and turned to depart. "The Master of this house feels kindly towards thee; but the minds of men are changeable, and may soon become weary of a man who stands alone. Thou hast honoured me with thy confidence, as thou before saidst when thou didst raise me out of the water. Therefore I beg of thee a favour. Once thou gavest me this gold ring; take it back now, O my lord, that I may show thee my truth; thou wilt bestow far more on me later, if the Gods send thee good fortune. The ring will procure thee a horse and dress, or gain thee a helpful companion."

"I would rather borrow from thee than from any other," replied Ingo; "but thou knowest a warrior does not go without gold to the battle. What Berthar handed over to me on that day when I lost him, that I still conceal in my dress, in order that my body should not lie lonely on the heath; for any one finding the gold on me

would in gratitude esteem me worthy of honourable burial."

"Then, Hero, think also prudently of the living; and if I may venture to advise thee, give of it to the maiden Frida; for they whisper in the house, that she tore off a silver bell for thee in order to please her mistress; and bestow something also on Wolf, thy chamberlain, that he may not be despised by the others because he serves a poor master. Do not be angry that I speak to thee as a trusty friend; but he who is accustomed to receive favour knows well how to win it."

Ingo reached his hand to him, laughing. "It is only to thee that I offer nothing," he said; "for I willingly remain in thy debt."

"And I in thine, so long as I breathe," said Volkmar; then greeting him, respectfully bowed as he left the threshold.

Ingo followed the advice of his trusty friend. As he placed two gold-pieces, on which the picture of the great Roman Emperor Constantine was to be seen, in the hands of his chamberlain, he observed, by the happy face of the man and his warm thanks, how valuable such a thing was among the forest people. And after the repast, he, in the presence of all, stepped up to Irmgard, and said—.

“Thy companion, Frida, has, with the silver she gave to the juggler, procured for me good tidings; gladly would I show my gratitude to her, and I beg of thee, noble maiden, to give back by these coins her gift.”

Then the foreign gold passed from hand to hand among the women; the Prince and all those who had a kindly feeling for him rejoiced that the guest had comported himself as became his dignity, and Ingo remarked, from the sudden zeal of the men, that their good-will became more active since they could hope for something good for themselves.

But Ingo sought for a gift for her who was dear to him. As Irmgard was standing under the elder bush near the court, he stepped hastily towards her; she heard his steps, but she did not turn round, so that no one could perceive the joy on her countenance. Thus, turned away from the others, their eyes met; and this time neither of them heard the night songstress, who upon a branch was mournfully telling her children of her departure. Ingo began speaking in a low tone.

“Once upon a time, Schwanhild, the ancestress of my family, flew in the feather dress of a swan over the earth; since then the last wing-feathers

of the swan have been the holy token which the men and women of my race bear on their helmets and frontlets, when they are festively adorned. We endeavour to rob living birds of their feathers; for to kill a swan is a crime among my people. To-day I have succeeded in gaining this ornament. To thee, friend, I offer it, if thou wilt accept and keep it. On the quill I have scratched the mark whereby I denote what is mine."

Irmgard was frightened; she guessed that he offered her through the feathers what he dared not say in words, and she asked uncertainly, "How shall that be mine which is thine?"

The man answered with deep emotion, "I only love life because I know a noble maiden who will at some time bear this token on her head before all the world." And he again held the ornament to her. Then Irmgard took the feather, and concealed it in her dress. His hand just slightly touched hers, but she felt the touch in her inmost heart.

"Irmgard!" cried out the Princess from the house, in a tone of command.

The two exchanged one more hearty greeting with their eyes, and the noble maiden then hastened to the house.

“What did the stranger say to thee just now?” began the mother to her daughter; “his hand touched thine, and I saw a blush on thy cheeks.”

“He showed me the wing-feather of a bird, which is the mark of recognition of his race when the heroes bear it on their heads,” answered Irmgard; but again a tell-tale blush passed over her cheeks.

“I once heard a fool who raised her voice aloud in the hall of the men, so that all remained silent, as the forest songsters are silent when a young cuckoo begins its cooing.”

“Was it presumptuous in me to point him out? it was not indecorous; my heart was full, and my friends will forgive me; do not thou, mother, be angry with me.”

But the Princess continued, “It gives me no pleasure to see the stranger remaining at our hearth. It becomes the master of the house to be hospitable to suppliants, but the mistress of the house must hold the keys with a firm hand, that the property may not be squandered; and she guards her poultry-yard, that the martens may not make their way in. If the stranger by his leap over the horses thought to leap into the inheritance of my lord, into provision-chamber and kitchen, his bold spirit will little avail him.

But thou, as thou art my daughter, shouldst keep at a distance from one who lives as a wild man, homeless, banished, and as poor as the travelling beggar who begs for alms at our gate."

Irmgard raised herself up proudly. "Of whom dost thou speak, Princess? Dost thou mean the Hero to whom the master of the house has offered the seat of honour? The innocent one, who came to us in confidence upon the oath of my father? I have heard that the father of my father mixed in a holy drink drops of his blood with the blood of a King's race, that their descendants might keep love and honour to one another. If the son of that King is a stranger to others, in the house of my grandfather none ought to call him so; thou thyself least of all."

"As I hear thy insolent speech," exclaimed the mother, "the old sorrow revives in my heart, that thy brother is no longer among the living. On the unhappy day on which he was slain by one of the King's men, thou becamest the only child of my care, and ill thou rewardest thy mother for her trouble."

"Were my brother alive, he also would desire, as the highest honour, to be the companion in war of the Hero whom thou insultest as a beggar."

"Since thy brother has vanished from this

earth, thou hast become the inheritor of this country, and thy mother has to consider to whom thy father should marry thee."

"If I am the inheritor in this house, I am also an inheritor of alliance duties and sworn oaths; and I intend to keep them truly. I have never refused honour to thy kindred—neither to uncle Sintram, nor to thy nephew Theodulf, whatever I may think of them in my heart; but thou must not blame me if I also show love to those who are friends of my father's family."

"Be silent, thou stubborn one," answered the mother, angrily; "too long has the Prince's will kept thee at home; it is time that thy haughty spirit should be controlled by marriage."

As the Princess left the room, Irmgard stood with looks transfixed, holding her hands clasped closely together.

"The Princess speaks harshly to the maidens," began Frida, entering; "in the milk-cellar the cream is turned."

"She is severe also against others," answered Irmgard, with difficulty striving for words. "Be thou true to me, for I have no one whom I can trust but thee, if thou hast courage to bear the displeasure of the Princess."

"I am a free woman; and I have promised to

be a companion to thee, not to the mistress of the house; and for thy sake I remain in the Prince's house, although my father desires to have me at home. Many a time have we overcome the anger of the Princess, as, believe me, we shall also do now, concerning what afflicts thee."

"My mother has become angry with our guest, to whom at first she was so kindly disposed, and I fear he will not be properly cared for; as when the mistress does not give directions the maidens are careless."

"Thou mayest be free from anxiety, as young Wolf is his chamberlain. If I gave the boy permission, he would tell me more of his master than we wish to hear."

"Let me hear everything," said Irmgard; "for it is well to know what guests need."

"And we shall learn easily from one and another," cried Frida, laughing. "Far better do I like the guest than the water-heron Theodulf, who carries his head so proudly. And this I say to thee,—when Theodulf's wooers come to the house, and assent is given to their coming, then shall they find a broom in front of the door at which they go out, that they may guess what we maidens think of their wooing."

After these bold words Irmgard concealed her

face with her hands; tears ran through her fingers; her whole body shook with anguish.

Frida embraced the princely girl in her arms, and knelt down before her, giving her kisses and tender words.

It did not happen accidentally that, a short time after the conversation between mother and daughter, the Hero Sintram rode up to the house. In the room of the Princess he sat long with the Host in confidential converse; he was conferring once again on the subject of the wooing of his relation, Theodulf; for so long as this nobleman was bound as a court attendant and by oath of service to the Prince, the formal wooing could not take place. But on the twelfth night of the New Year the Prince was to release him from his oath; then Theodulf would make his entrance as a free wooer, and the marriage might take place in the spring. All was determined—even the bridal presents and dowry—and the Princess advised that the men should renew to each other their old promise concerning this secret arrangement. Sintram smiled with pleasure as he again mounted his horse, and when the Host led him out of the door, and there unobservantly took leave with a warm pressure of the hand, the departing guest altogether despised

the broom which the angry Frida had placed by the side of the door; Theodulf only, who had come up at the departure, gave the broom a kick with his foot that sent it a long way off, and cast on Frida in the court a look full of bitter hatred.

Thus passed, with ardent sun and storms, the glad summer. The fields were cleared, and the country folk were sociable. The more distinguished houses of the district desired in succession to entertain the guest; banquets alternated with hunting expeditions over the forest hills; and the Prince and Ingo were now seldom at home. To the Prince the value of the guest became still greater when he saw in what repute he was held by the principal men of the district, and how distinguished and right-minded he showed himself. Of the anxieties in the apartments of the ladies the master of the house observed nothing; the prudent Hostess was silent as to what might disturb the thoughts of her lord; she was contented that the Hero should roam away for weeks together. But Ingo perceived that Irmgard looked serious, and he was angry that it was so difficult for him to speak to her without witnesses.

Once Ingo rode with the Prince to the same spot which he trod when he first came over

the mountain. In the forest yellow leaves fluttered to the ground; through the openings sounded the hunting calls of the men and the deep cry of the hounds. The well-fed cattle ran bellowing about; the herdsmen prepared for the outburst from the wilderness into the villages; and the maidens from the Prince's house were again occupied in lifting into the waggon the last load from the milk-cellar. Whilst Herr Answald was watching the abundance, Ingo stood next to Irmgard. The latter pointed to Frida, who was passing by with a milk-jug. "From this source thou didst quaff thy first drink with us, and there, where thou standest, I saw thee for the first time. Since then the cheerful green has disappeared, and the wild birds have flown away."

"From thy countenance also joy has vanished," replied Ingo, tenderly.

But Irmgard continued, "Happy once were the exalted women who in feather dresses soared along wherever their wishes led them. I know a maiden who stands by the torrent, and longs for the heavenly power. She would like to work two feather garments for the swan and his mate; but vain is the wish, and she gazes sorrowfully after them, when the feathered flock soar from their fields into the distance."

"Confide in me," said Ingo in a low tone; "what disturbs thy mind?"

Irmgard was silent. "The day will come when others will tell thee, not I," she at last answered. "If thou tarry with us during the winter, I do not fear what anxieties it may bring——"

The conversation was interrupted by wild shouts and a foreign war-cry. Ingo rushed out; as before in the hall, his countenance lighted up with joy, whilst the other men sprang up in a body, and seized their weapons.

"They come in peace," exclaimed Bero's daughter; "my father rides among them." She pointed to a troop of horsemen who, rejoicing and swinging their spears, were rushing down from the height. Ingo hastened towards them; the riders sprang down, and surrounded the Hero; they held his arms, bent over his hands, and clasped his knees. Again and again sounded the wild cry of jubilee. Ingo called each individual by name, and embraced and kissed them, while tears fell from his eyes. His looks wandered from one to the other in vain search; for all did not stand alive before him whom he had hoped to greet. And yet the happiness of that hour was so great that he and the strangers long forgot the presence

of the others. The Prince's men, who had been drawn out of the forest by the war-cry, gathered round him : tears were in his eyes also, and in those of the noble maiden, and they listened with absorbing interest to the rapid questions and answers, laughings and lamentations, of the strangers. Bero looked upon the troop more calmly, whilst he told the Prince, "I had ridden southwards over our mountains, down as far as Idisbach, where the small people, the Marvingians, dwell, and as I was dealing with the people there about a herd of cattle, I fell in with this flight of wild geese, who were seeking for their goose leader. I knew about them, and as their active manners pleased me, I brought them here."

Ingo approached the Prince. "Forgive, O Prince, if we in our joy have forgotten to seek for thy favour. These men are banished, like myself; for my sake they abandoned their loved home, and they also have neither parents nor friends; but to one another we are blood-brothers for life and death, and our pride is, that we honour one another, and share fortune and misfortune, as long as we remain homeless wanderers on the earth. On their true hearts alone rests the throne of the poor Ingo; where they lay their heads down, there must his also repose.

Thou hast received me kindly ; but now I have become a host, and I am uncertain what thy views may be about me."

"They are all welcome," exclaimed Herr Answald, with warmth of heart ; "the manor is large, and the barns are full : a greeting to you, noble guests."

"But I advise," interposed Bero, cautiously, "that thou, Chieftain of the district, shouldst divide the strangers among the villages. All the neighbours will receive them willingly as guests ; then every one will have his share, and none will be burdened. For they lead also with cords horses gained as booty—among them capital animals ; see this grey, my lord ! many a neighbour would be pleased to purchase a horse, and to listen in the winter at the hearth-fire to the warlike adventures of the strangers."

Herr Answald laughed, but he replied eagerly, "Thou thinkest rightly, Bero ; but the House must have the first right, and this time, neighbour, it must not be taken from it. You guests will lodge in the sleeping-room with my boys ; there you may remain sheltered from the winter storms."

"My intention was good," said Bero. "Lead my brown horse here, Frida." He approached an

old warrior among the Vandals, gave him his hand, and said, "Remember our conversation. You stand now on the Prince's ground; if any of you should at a future time desire to be under the roof of the peasant, you will be welcome on the free moor." He spoke a few more words to his daughter, then sprang upon his horse, and giving a last greeting, trotted along the valley.

Ingo now led his comrades one by one up to the Master of the house, giving their names. Foremost stood an aged warrior, whose limbs seemed cast in bronze; his features were marked, his look bold, and his long grey beard hung down—a hero who one could see was accustomed to battles, and hardened against every danger.

"This is Berthar, a noble man. He led me, when I was a boy, under the protection of his shield, from his burning house, my last place of refuge within the boundary of my country: the Burgundians, who were then in alliance with my uncle, had set fire to it; since then he has been my teacher in all warlike work; as a father he has guarded my youth; I have to thank him if I have not been unworthy of my ancestors."

As Herr Answald offered his hand to the Hero, he answered: "I remember the day when my father entertained thine at his house; it was an

autumn day like to-day, and there had been good sport on the mountains which we call the giant mountains. I killed the first boar, and Hero Irmfried invited me jokingly to hunt in the forest hills of Thuringia. I have journeyed long, and white hairs appeared on my head before I entered thy precincts; but now I am here, O my lord, and ready, if thou permit me, to follow thee on the hunting-path."

This speech delighted the Prince; he also named his companions to the stranger, according to their rank, and desired both parties to be good comrades to each other. Then he rode forward with Irmgard, in order that Ingo might have confidential talk with his restored friends. And when the Vandals were again alone, they once more raised their acclamations, and rode together in joyful tumult. Again questions and answers passed to and fro, till Berthar led the troop to the house. It was difficult to keep the rank, for the faithful friends were ever pressing round their lord, and their cries echoed from the mountains. Ingo on the way said to Berthar—

"It is like a miracle to me that I hold thy hand, my father. But thou must again tell me everything—how you were all saved from the battle, and found me."

“The master went along the path of the fishes,” began Berthar, laughing; “his retinue followed him. We struck in our retreat many sword-strokes against the pursuing bands, till I spied out a place on the bank for a leap; like frogs thy boys hopped into the Rhine—not all, my lord; thou thinkest also of those who are missing to-day. On our linden shields we struggled down in dire distress, the arrows of the enemy buzzing about us. Then a friendly God sent us help. A willow stem—a strong trunk, with roots and branches—drove slowly along the stream; sheltering the weary ones, and drawing it with us, we directed it downwards from the Roman bank; thus we went on in a thick crowd, mixed with flying warriors of the Alemanni, like a shoal of eels swarming about a dead animal. When we who were saved had climbed up the bank on the opposite side of the river, we concealed ourselves in a thick forest, and enquired every night in the valleys for news of thee. We thought to show the last service to our master, and to stand round his last resting-place. But vain was all our search and enquiry; none of the fugitives had beheld thy face. Then, pressed by the Roman army, we sorrowfully struck across the Black Forest, into the country of the Burgundians.

When we were led by the Burgundian sentinels into the presence of their king, Gundomar, the fame of thy leap had already reached him, and he imagined thee to have been taken up to the hall of the Gods. He had been an enemy to thee, but now he sighed when I mentioned thy name; he thought of thy virtue, and was averse to deliver us bound to the Romans. He begged us to follow his army in an expedition which he was preparing to make to the East, against the March people on the Danube. We were in great want of horses and dresses, and we were like jackdaws among mice, longing for booty. Therefore we accompanied him, and it succeeded well with us; thy boys obtained good horses, and went stately along with filled bags. Last month we were lying one evening on the banks of the Danube. The Burgundians collected the booty, drank jovially, and chattered, as they like to do, with Roman traders and jugglers who had hastened thither for gain and gifts. But thy boys were sad at heart, and looked at the dry leaves driving along in the autumn wind. Then a traveller came to me, and began with a greeting.

“‘ If it please thee, Hero, I will tell thee a riddle, if thou canst find an answer: “Who

swung the minstrel into the boat? Who ducked under spears like a miraculous swan?"

"I was startled, and answered, 'King Ingo swung Volkmar into the boat, and the King vanished into the stream like a miraculous swan!'

"Then answered the stranger, 'Tis thou whom I seek, and I have wandered far for that, as the messenger of my comrade. Now, as I have found thee, hear the second message that Volkmar sends thee: "The guardian of the swans sits in Irmfried's hall; the fugitive tarries by the hearth of the Thuringian."'

"Then we became more joyful than I can say, for we understood what the name of Irmfried signified. King Gundomar wished to keep us, but I begged him to allow of our return home. But I did not tell him that the home of thy boys is where the person of their master throws its shadow."

"Poor boys!" said Ingo, gloomily. "The shadow has become small; it covers no more than the track of your feet."

"But a new sun rises for thee," said the old man, consolingly, "which will cast thy shadow over the breadth of the land. Now it is necessary that the weary boys shall find a refuge against the winter storm. As soon as the buds

begin to swell on the trees we will accompany thee on some new heroic expedition. Tell me, O King, whether the roofs which I see before me will shield us well during the winter."

"May the Gods graciously so dispose it!" replied Ingo, earnestly. "I have found more happiness here than I expected, and less security than I hoped."

The door of the Prince's house was opened wide; the Host received the strangers, and accompanied them to the hall: there the greeting repast was prepared, and the Vandals were distributed amongst the Prince's men on the bench. The following morning there began an active hammering and lifting; from the provisions of planks and rafters, which lay in high piles in the courtyard, a sleeping-room was prepared by Ingo's house, and beside it a provisional enclosure for the horses. After a few days the building was erected, for great was the number of helping hands. The neighbours also came, greeted the strangers, and examined the great string of unemployed horses; they bought and exchanged, and took their own to winter fodder instead of the strangers' horses, which they retained. Around the quiet Prince's court there was now the jovial crowding of the district

people, and the tumult of men and horses; the lofty figures of the Vandals walked in their foreign warrior dress amongst the houses, and lay near the Prince's men on the steps of the hall carelessly laughing and willingly relating what the customs of their race were. They went with the Prince's retainers into the forest, and rode as welcome guests among the villages of the district.

But the masters in the house observed after a few weeks that it was difficult to keep the peace among their followers; for the young men were proud and hasty in their anger, and the old watched jealously the honour of their masters. Thus Radgai the Vandal, and Agino, a wild fellow of the house, quarrelled with one another, because the Vandal had given an ornament to a maiden of the village who smiled upon him. On account of this Agino was displeased, and said, mockingly, "We had thought that the treasure of thy master was little, but now we see that you keep good things in your bags."

"He who ventures his life in battle," answered the Vandal, "puts money in his pocket, but horn grows upon the hand of him who, like thee, works on the threshing-floor."

This speech was heard by the people of the House, and when the next morning Berthar

came with his men to the granary, in order to fetch oats for the horses for the following days, Hildebrand, who was the distributor in the farm, refused him the threshed oats, and said, "If you have despised the callous hands of our boys, you may stamp out the sheaves with your own feet, or with those of your horses, as suits you best; my comrades refuse to work for you, as you speak so roughly to them. Take the oats in sheaves, and not in sacks."

Berthar answered in an appeasing tone, "It was wrong in my comrades to despise the customs of our Host's country. But thou thyself art a travelled man, and knowest that customs differ in various countries. Elsewhere the master's followers lift the sheaves in baskets; they cut and winnow the fodder, and ride about the field with the harrow; but it would be considered inglorious for them to hold the plough-tail and the flail. Therefore have a little forbearance with my comrades, because they, as strangers, are surprised at your customs."

But Hildebrand answered ill-temperedly, "Those who eat of our bread should accommodate themselves to our customs; therefore take only the sheaves; from henceforth thou shalt receive nothing else."

Then the Vandals were obliged to take the sheaves to their stalls, and Berthar ordered fiercely, "Throw the sheaves on the chopping-bench, and cut till the iron breaks."

After that unwise speech of Radgai's there were many quarrels among the men, but both parties endeavoured to conceal it from their masters. They had in the first instance stood in the same ranks at the war-games, and imitated each other's style of fight, as the Princes advised them; now they entered separately into the contests, so that the Prince, before the beginning of the riding-games with shield and staves, said to Theodulf, "Why do the guests keep aloof on their horses? we should be glad to see who deserves the most praise." Theodulf answered, "They themselves wish to avoid the contest; the staves of the Thuringians sound too hard on their shields." Then the Prince rode up to Berthar. "Come, Hero, mix thy ranks with our people." The old man answered, "It is only for the sake of peace that I keep our boys separate, lest in the heat of the struggle an ill-thrown staff should excite a quarrel." So the Prince was obliged to watch silently the separate horsemanship. He could not also help hearing how his retinue laughed scornfully when

the strangers threw their clubs; then a saucy fellow out of the ranks of the Thuringians cried out a tormenting word of insult—"dog slayer." On the other hand, when the retinue sprang with the throw of the stone, and one of their springs failed, then the Vandals made wry faces, and muttered a mocking word which they had fabricated, because the Thuringians at their meals had highly esteemed round balls made of wheaten dough.

When, after the games, the circular dances began, one could see that the maidens of the household only associated themselves with their own countrymen; and when the strangers could not find a village girl who would dance with them, they were obliged to look on. This displeased the Prince, and he called out to the Vandals, "Why do my guests despise my people?" Again Berthar answered, "The maidens of the country complain that our springs twist their ankles." Then the fearless Frida stepped forth, bowed low to the old man, and said, "I care little whether I displease others when I take the hand of a stranger. For I know one of the household who threatens the maidens if they dance with the guests. If it pleaseth thee, Hero Berthar, and thou dost not think me too insigni-

ficant, lead me to the dance." Berthar laughed, as did also the Princes; the old man took the hand of the maiden, sprang about like a youth, and swung her actively over the turf, so that all looked at him and made exclamations of approbation.

The strangers saw well that the Princess did not hold them in much consideration; she seldom spoke even to the noblest among them—not even to the Hero Berthar, although he was of noble race. But the Princess had also some ground for complaint, for two of the Vandals—the brothers Alebrand and Walbrand—had exchanged sharp words with two of the Princess's maidens, and, lying in wait in the evening, had kissed them against their will, and had tumbled their dress. Therefore the Princess went to Ingo, and raised a loud complaint of the profligacy of his men, and Ingo, deeply vexed by the hard words of the Princess and the ill-conduct of his followers, held a court of justice over the guilty ones at his own house. And although it appeared on examination that it was more wantonness than vice, he punished them severely, both by words and by social disgrace, putting them down in the lowest place on his bench: sorrowfully did the evil-doers sit after that in the circle of their companions. When Ingo once before this was re-

turning to the hearth of the Prince from his own quarters, he heard in the new building near it the sharp grating of the mill-stone, and, much astonished, he asked Berthar, "Do the maidens turn the mill-stone in the sleeping-house of the men?" Then answered the old man, "As thou thyself askest, thou shalt know. It is not the servant-maids that are turning it; thy boys are obliged to do the inglorious work of serving-women, if they would have any bread; for the maidens refuse any longer to grind the corn for us, and the Hostess yields to them. Bitter is such work for the heroes of a King. I would gladly have concealed from thee what is a dishonour to thy hospitable friend."

Ingo stepped behind a pillar, and covered his face with his hands.

Outside howled the north-storm round the roof, throwing a grey covering of snow and frozen water over the house. "An unpliant fellow rages above the rafters of the house," continued Berthar; "he now rules over the roads and fields, and may prevent the departure of my King from this place. Yet I suspect that thou thinkest thereof; therefore hear something that the Hero Isanbart, my old war-companion, confided to me when I yesterday secretly sought him. The Roman

trader, Tertullus, was with his pack-horses in the district ; he came from the West, and was going to the Castle of the King. Thou knowest the man ; he is considered by the Alemanni as the most cunning spy of Cæsar. Now he has avoided the abode in which we dwell, although the property on which we are staying would be the best market for a merchant. But throughout the district he has enquired concerning thee and us, and has held hostile language—that Cæsar seeks for thee, and would pay a high price if he could look upon thy body or thy head under his banner, in order that the evil omen may be destroyed which, since thy seizure of the dragon, has hung heavy on the hearts of the Roman warriors. If the Roman trader goes to King Bisino, he conceals in his chest rather presents to the King than wares ; for he was in no haste to untie his bundle, as is usually the manner of these people. Therefore the Hero Isanbart is full of anxiety, and sends thee warning, that thou mayest trust a message from the King less than before.”

Ingo laid his hand on the shoulder of his trusty friend. “But thou also, Hero, wouldst rather ride into the trap which the King prepares for us, than endure to hear any longer this grinding of the mill-stone by which a hostile

woman wounds our honour. Yet I am held here fast as by an iron band. For this grievance I will beg for redress from the Prince, but I will not leave the district before I know something which I most eagerly wish and hope for."

When Herr Answald on the next morning was sitting at breakfast with his companions, without the stranger, the door opened, and Irmgard stood on the threshold; behind her Frida was carrying a sack of flour. "Forgive me, my lord," began Irmgard, "if I venture to offer thee what the hand of thy daughter has helped to grind at the mill-stone." The noble maiden placed the sack at the feet of the Prince. The Prince looked at it in astonishment.

"What does this powdery gift mean? Is it to be a cake-offering to the Gods, because the hands of a noble maiden have turned the stone?"

"Not as an offering," replied Irmgard, "but as an expiation for wounded duties of hospitality our free hands ground the corn. I beg that thou, my lord, if it seems right to thee, wilt send this flour to thy guests; for I hear that thy household refuse them both the flour for broth and bread, and the noble guests are obliged, under thy roof itself, to do the work themselves, like serving-maids.

Then the veins in the Prince's forehead swelled, and rising, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Who has done me this dishonour? Speak, Hildebrand, for thou hast charge of the repasts of the guests."

Hildebrand, embarrassed, bowed before the anger of his Prince. "The maidens were embittered by the unseemly conduct of the Vandals, and wept over the hard work, and the Princess thought that they had ground of complaint."

"How couldst thou retaliate the unseemly conduct of a few by imposing heavy suffering upon all? Thou hast dishonoured thy lord before his guests, and caused evil reports among the people. Take the sack at once, and carry it to the lodgings of the guests; and I advise thee, old man, to go with it, and make them such excuses as they may be willing to accept. But to the maidens I say, if in future they should ever complain, a hard hand will cause them greater sobbing."

"Be not angry with the maidens, my lord," said Irngard; "they are usually willing, and would have borne the increased work; but there is one in thy house who has the audacity to order about the servants like a master: this is thy sword-bearer, Theodulf. Many fear his hard nature, and are anxious, either now or in the future, to gain his favour. He forbids the maidens, at his pleasure, to

work for the guests, and also to dance with them. No one ventures to complain to thee; but I as thy daughter cannot bear that in my father's house one who is a servant should injure our honour."

When the Prince learnt this, he bethought him that his child was right, and yet felt a secret anxiety, because the maiden who now stood so angrily before him, spoke with such contempt of the man whom he secretly had destined for her husband. He therefore became wild with anger against all, and exclaimed to his daughter, "Not in vain hast thou turned the mill; with hard stone do thy words grind the character of thy cousin. Yet I do not blame thy gift, for it may perhaps atone for a heavy injury. But thou," he exclaimed, raising his hand threateningly against Theodulf, "forget not that I am sole master in this house as long as I live, so that I may not forget that the mistress of the house wishes thee well. If any of you dare to use hostile language or secret malice against the guests, this house and his skin will become too narrow for him."

Herr Answald sent all out, and continued to vex himself alone. At last he went to the Princess, and spoke to her also angry words, and little praise of her nephew, Theodulf. Frau

Gundren changed colour; she saw well that she had ventured too much, and that her husband was with good reason anxious about evil reports, and she spoke to him appeasingly. "What has happened with the maidens ought to be a warning for the strangers, that they also may respect the rights of the house; it is now arranged, and will in the future be avoided; therefore do not thou care further about it. As to what concerns my relation, thou knowest well how truly he has served thee, and that on thy account he bears his scar." When she had succeeded in pacifying her lord a little, she continued—"How free from anxiety did all appear in house and field a few months ago; but now peace has disappeared from the house, there is discord in the country, and the anger of the King threatens us with difficulties. A distinguished man is thy guest, but misfortune follows his footsteps. I think of thy daughter, my lord; she prays that her marriage with Theodulf may be given up. The mind of the child raises itself against the will of her parents."

"What has Ingo to do with the ill-will of the maiden?" asked the Prince, angrily.

Frau Gundren looked at him with open eyes. "He who rides upon horses heeds little the herbs

on the ground. Observe, my lord, her looks and cheeks whenever she speaks to the stranger."

"No wonder that he pleases her," replied the Prince.

"But if he should think of marriage?"

"That is impossible," exclaimed the Prince, with a discordant laugh. "He is a banished man, without possessions and property."

"It is warm in the forest arbour, sitting by the hearth," continued the Princess.

"Could a stranger venture on anything so mad—a man who does not belong to our people, and has no other right than that of being tolerated in the country? Thou art unnecessarily anxious, Gundren, but the thought of it even excites my spirit."

"If thou thinkest so," said the Princess, with emphasis, "then thou shouldst not rejoice in the day on which he entered our house, nor in the song in the hall, nor in the wandering men who now dwell with us, boasting of the rights of hospitality, and consuming the property of my lord. The King desires to have the stranger; let him go, before he and his troop occasion sorrow to many among us."

"Dost thou know more of the intimacy betwixt him and my child than thou hast told me?" asked the Prince, standing before her.

“Only what may be discovered by him who chooses to see,” answered the Princess, cautiously.

“I have received him with great acclamations and a joyful heart,” continued Herr Answald; “now I cannot send him away as one who is a burden. It is the father’s right to choose a husband for his daughter, and there can be no marriage for the child but through the father; that thy child knows also, for she is not without sense. I be-
think me of the oath which I have made to thy friends; but do thou restrain, if thou canst, the arrogance of thy nephew, and take care that he may make himself more estimable to our child than he now is, lest the stubbornness of the maiden should break out in the approaching spring, when we adorn her for her marriage.”

After this morning the spirit of Herr Answald was troubled whenever he came across the stranger; gloomily did he ponder on the presumption, and suspiciously did he watch the words and bearing of the guest; and he himself thought sometimes that his dwelling by his hearth through the winter would be a burden. On one of these days of ill-humour, the Hero Sintram rode up to him, sent as a messenger of bad tidings from the King to the Chieftain and his district; for the King made decided complaints of the concealed

residence of the foreign troop, and demanded with threatenings that they should be delivered into his hands. The Prince perceived that danger threatened either the guest, or him and his countrymen. As he was not a mean-spirited man, he soon recovered his composure. He went to Ingo, and told him frankly that he would invite the Chiefs of the district to a secret council, under the pretence of a hunting expedition. Ingo bowed assentingly to what he said, and replied, "It is the right of the Host to speak first, and then the guest."

Messengers rode in all directions; and three days after the nobles and wise men of the district were again assembled by the hearth of the Chieftain. But it was no longer summer air, when the minds of men are joyfully disposed, but hard winter time, when anxieties and ill-will arise. This time the countenance of the Prince was sorrowful when he began. "The King has sent a second message about the Hero Ingo and his followers, and this time to my countrymen and me, not by the minstrel, but by the Hero Sintram. The King of this nation demands to have the strangers delivered up to him: whether we shall withstand his command, or, thinking of our own safety, do according to his will, is what I ask you."

Then rose Sintram, and repeated the threatenings of the King. "He will take the strangers by force, if we do not send them; his men bluster loud, and rejoice in the idea of an expedition against our properties. Once, foreseeing this, I warned you; now the danger threatens and approaches us. Though we have indeed promised to defend hospitably the stranger, now it is not he alone who resides on the land; a foreign race rides through our valleys, and his wild followers become a burden to the people."

A long silence followed this speech, till Isanbart at last raised his voice. "As I am old, I am not surprised to see how easily the minds of men alter; before now I have seen many a Host who gladly greeted a guest, but gladly also dismissed him. Therefore shouldst thou, O Prince, before the representatives of thy people, say whether the foreign Hero has violated the rights of thy house, and wounded thy honour; or have his followers practised evil deeds among the people?"

Prince Answald replied, with hesitation, "I do not complain of any outrage which the guest has committed, but the nature of his men is unpliant and extraordinary, and they adapt themselves ill to the customs of our country."

Then Isanbart nodded his grey head, and spoke.

“I also have experienced the same when I dwelt as a guest with thy father Irmfried in the land of the Vandals. We also, as far as I can remember, were unyielding and strange to the Vandals; yet our Hosts laughed kindly about it, and accommodated the quarrels of the men whenever they broke out; they always begged us to stay longer, and dismissed us with rich presents. Therefore I think it becomes a Host to be cautious before he receives foreign guests, and to exercise forbearance as long as they dwell under his protection.”

Then Rothari, whom they called “Puff-cheek,” sprang up and exclaimed, “There is among every people of the earth, as far as I understand it, a law that the followers belong to their lord, and he who receives the master cannot deny the peace to his followers, if the strangers themselves do not break the peace by their misdeeds. Well do I understand that the number of comrades under the oath will become a burden to thee, O Prince, for the number of men and horses is too great for one property. But thou didst desire, when they came, to have alone the honour of entertaining them. Had they been distributed among the houses of the nobles and peasants, every one according to his birth, then the guests would have burdened no one, and many by the evening

fire of the hearth would have delighted in their accounts of foreign lands."

The Prince, much annoyed, answered, "I did not ask for counsel concerning the residence on my property, but concerning the command of the King, which presses upon us heavily."

Then spoke Bero, the peasant. "Other things press upon us, my lord, more than two-and-twenty strangers. The King seeks only a pretext in order to obtain the tenth of our herds and sheaves of our fields; but we are well aware that our herds and fields are too small, even without this, for our necessities. All our villages are filled with vigorous young men; they demand building ground for new houses, arable land, meadows, and forest pastures. Who can give it them? Everything is divided and fenced in; the herdsmen complain that the herds of the lords of the manor are too large, and the mast and acorns too few; and the clearing of the woods is withstood by the community, and still more by the Chiefs. Therefore many think that the time is come when our people must again settle on the other side of the boundary, as in the time of our fathers and ancestors; and we ask in the villages, Where is there fresh land on man's earth to settle on? Thus discontent prevails among the

people, and our young men would be pleased with any one who would offer them free acres, even though it were the King. I say this as a warning; for dangerous is the greed of Princes when they desire for themselves the weapons of the people. Yet I do not advise that we should deliver up the guests to the King; if the King would take them away by force, let him try. The thought, even, excites anger in me, that the boys of the King should drive away the cattle, and set fire to the barns; but I would not be forced from our rights. Every one would consider it unjust if we were to drive out our guests into the snow-storm. And I would rather be destroyed with my house, than break my oath to them from fear."

Again Rothari sprang up, shook the peasant by the hand, delighted, and cried out, "Thus speaks a gallant neighbour; listen to his words."

At last Albwin began, with winning mien. "What the freeman says I also agree to. I advise that we should keep our oath, which may perhaps become burdensome to us, if the guests ask it, and desire our protection. But if they willingly depart, let us give them assistance and presents, that they may go safely wherever their wishes lead them. But we will not deliver them

into the hands of the King, except with their own free-will."

Then the greater number expressed their assent—the Prince also, and Sintram. But Rothari exclaimed, angrily, "You would act like the fox with the farmer's wife, when he said to her, 'I will pay thee for the fowl, if thou ask nothing for it;'" and Isanbart said, warningly, "How can you lay the duty on the conscience of the guest which lies on you and your children? Who can praise the Host who claims the magnanimity of the guest?"

Thus did the forest people dispute together, and opinions remained divided. Meanwhile Hildebrand in the courtyard sang aloud the hunter's call, and blowing on his great horn, collected the forest comrades, armed with spear and cross-bow, and leading hounds in leashes. The Thuringians hastened out of the courtyard gate; the Vandals, who had no dogs, came out with thick iron spears, curved horns, and clubs. Hildebrand divided the hunting party into two troops—the men belonging to the Manor, and the guests; the men from the district he also divided into two. The hunters spoke in a low tone the forest blessing; then Berthar began to the master of the hunt, "It will be difficult for thy guests to succeed without hounds on the smooth path.

Take care, at least, Hero, as thou knowest the paths of the wild cattle, that my troop may not tread the snow in vain; for even the quickest foot can never reach the game where none is to be found. Many a time hast thou sent us astray, far from the course of the forest giants; take care, if it pleaseth thee, that we may not be mortified before the district comrades."

"He who is without good fortune and skill blames the driver," replied Hildebrand. "Thou complainest without cause; I have made a fair division."

The horn gave the call, the hounds pulled at the leashes; the hunters broke out joyfully, and greeted the ladies, who, standing at the gate, looked on at the departure. When the Vandals passed by Irmgard, they suddenly raised a ringing shout, and lowering their weapons, bent their knees before her. Ingo also came towards her.

"Thou alone, Hero, dost not listen to the hunting-call," said Irmgard.

"Others also remain behind," replied Ingo, pointing to the hall.

"Do not doubt their faithfulness," said Irmgard earnestly. "When thou art with thy heroes, we do not fear much that fresh strife should break out betwixt them and our men." Thus did the

woman he loved urge him to the chase, which was to be sorrowful to many.

Ingo equipped himself quickly for the hunt, and hastened after his comrades; he reached them before the separation of the parties, and was received by his warriors with acclamation; the country guests also rejoiced in his coming, and they all entered the forest together in good fellowship. Hildebrand pointed to the paths, and, led by the youths of the village, one band after another disappeared among the stems of the trees, along the windings of the valley. Soon were heard in the distance the strokes of the drivers on the stems of the trees, the cry of the hounds, and sometimes a loud blast of the horn. This time the Vandals had better success; they roused a herd of cattle—among them a splendid bull, which had been heard of before at the house—and they succeeded in driving the herd from the height into a deep valley, where the snowdrifts delayed the progress of the huge animals. Then the men dashed down from above towards the gigantic bull, with a loud hunting-cry, shooting their arrows, and casting their spears: the comrades pressed down the valley from the heights, and they killed many of the herd; only the mighty bull, chief of the herd, broke through to a

more open space. Then Ingo threw a heavy spear at him: a stream of blood followed the blow. "He has it!" cried out Ingo, and was answered by loud hurrahs. But the forest giant escaped to the heights. Ingo bounded after him spearless, swinging his knife. Again the beast broke down into a deep valley, dragging the spear; and whilst Ingo rushed forward along the height, in order to get before him on the ground free from snow, he heard amidst the cry of the hounds a hunting-call and the sound of the horn; and when he plunged into the valley, he found the bull on the ground, with Theodulf's spear in its body. The man was standing on the animal, and blew the cry of victory. "The game is mine, according to forest right," exclaimed Ingo, and sprang upon the body of the fallen animal; "my spear gave him the death-blow." The two men stood over the prize opposite each other, and hot hatred flashed from their eyes. "Mine is the weapon, and mine the bull," cried Theodulf. Then Ingo tore the spear of the other out of the body of the bull, and flung it far away, so that it remained hanging in the branches of a pine-tree. The Thuringian gnashed his teeth with rage; for one moment he appeared as if he would rush against Ingo, and strike him with his fists, but the haughty bearing of the other daunted

him; he sprang back, and incited the hounds against him. The raging beasts rushed howling on the Hero. In vain did Hildebrand cry, "Woe is me!" Ingo struck down the fiercest with his knife; the Vandals sprang to their King's side to save him from his danger, and drove their spears into the bodies of the hounds. "The chase is over," cried out Berthar, in a tone of command; "now another begins: the scoundrel who set the hounds on our King shall not see another sun. To-day we have been hound-slayers, as thou calledst us, and thou art the last hound we shall slay." He raised his axe for the throw, but Ingo seized his arm with iron grasp. "Let no one dare to touch him; the man belongs to my sword. But thou, Hildebrand, appoint the judges according to forest laws, and let there be a decision on my rights, on the spot where lies the bloody track and slain beast." Each band chose a man, and these two a third. The judges examined the wound, and followed the death-track up to the place where Ingo's spear had struck the bull; then they turned back, conferred together, and pronounced their judgment: "The game belongs to the Hero Ingo." A triumphant smile passed over the face of the King as he turned his back to the bull.

"I advise," began Hildebrand, with sorrowful

countenance, "that the bands shall not return to the house at the same time; if it pleases you, ye heroes, take the precedence."

"You are the lightest," replied Berthar; "my comrades will have trouble in carrying their game out of the forest. Yet I think that we must not renounce the honour of the hunt; for this hunt will long be spoken of in the country."

The followers of Herr Answald went in silence to the house; only Theodulf spoke in his haughty manner, in order to control by these words the rage that was boiling within him. Without hunting-cry they entered the court, and Hildebrand hastened to the Prince.

It was dark when the victorious band arrived with their trophy. "Sound the triumphal blast," cried Berthar, "as is befitting so rich a trophy." The hunting-shout resounded, but no one opened the gate of the courtyard, and Wolf was obliged to spring forward and push back the cross-beam. The Vandals laid their spoil down in front of the Prince's house; they parted, with a greeting, from the country guests, and collected together quietly in their own quarters. The dwellings lay in darkness, and the winter storms howled over the roofs; but in all the houses, and in the hall, there was a murmur of suppressed talk.

VI.

THE DEPARTURE.

IN the grey of the following morning Ingo rode towards the meadow, with his two sword companions, Berthar and Wolf, for the single combat on which the sun might not look. The snow crackled under their feet; the night wind roared above their heads, and drove the snow-clouds from the mountains into the valley; the black covering of clouds concealed all the light of heaven; only the spirits of the dead ruled upon the earth; they cried from the wind, they rattled among the dry branches of the trees, and gurgled in the icy water the news that of two sworn companions of one hearth, one must depart from the light of the sun, and descend into the cold realm of the mist. Berthar pointed silently to where, in the dim morning twilight, three men stood on the other side of the stream; they were Theodulf, with Sintram and Agino, his comrades. "Their feet

have been quicker than ours," said Ingo, discontentedly; "glory to those who first turned their backs on the foggy meadow." Before them lay the spot appointed for the fight—a sandy island, surrounded on both sides by the eddying water, and covered with a thin coating of snow. The assistants greeted one another silently over the stream; they went to the willows on the bank, cut strong branches, and peeled the rind with their knives. Then Berthar and Sintram waded through the water; both stepped upon the ground at the same time, and marked out the spot for the fight with white wands. Then each stepped from thence to the ends of the island—the one up the stream, the other down—and made a sign with his hand to his combatant. The combatants bowed themselves before the preserving Gods, and murmured a prayer; then they waded through the water to their companions. The assistants drew back over the stream, and the mortal enemies sprang at one another without shields, in casques and coats of mail, with brandished swords. Steel struck upon steel; round them the wind groaned and the icy water gurgled. It was a desperate struggle betwixt man and man. Theodulf showed himself not unworthy of the reputation that he had among his comrades. For a time the struggle

endured which leads so quickly to death, and Berthar looked discontentedly on the red in the morning sky, the messenger of day. Then Theodulf staggered under heavy blows, and again Ingo sprang at him, and fractured his skull through the iron helmet by a strong sword-stroke, so that a stream of blood burst forth, and the Prince's man sank backwards on the snow. Ingo flung himself over him, and raised his sword with intent to plunge the point of it into his throat. At the same moment the first rays of the sun broke over the hills; the red glow fell on the countenance of the wounded man. Sintram forgot in this danger of death the prescribed silence, and cried out over the stream, "Forbear! the sun sees it." With the ray of light, and the cry, softer thoughts came across the wrathful soul of the conqueror; he drew his sword back, and said, "The King of Heaven shall not behold me piercing my sword through the retainer of my hospitable friend. Live, if thou canst!" and he turned away. Theodulf murmured, as he lay on the ground, raising his fist against him, "I do not thank thee." But Ingo sprang through the icy water on to the bank, and turned his back on the island and the fallen man, whilst Berthar said, reproachfully, "For the first time the King

has been niggardly in paying the money for the journey of a deadly enemy into the land of mist." "I do not care about the revenge of a man that is lying under my sword," replied Ingo. His sword-comrades followed him silently, whilst the friends of the other rushed over the water, and tore away the armour of the wounded man.

In front of the guests' dwellings stood the troop of Vandals, all ready equipped; they stopped Berthar with their greetings when they saw the King return in safety from the meadow. In the court the Prince's men were collected, and the country guests, in gloomy expectation, till the loud wailing cry of Sintram resounded, and behind him two men carried the fallen Hero on a litter into the courtyard. When the litter was laid down in front of the house of the women, the Princess rushed out, threw herself with loud cries down by her relative, and raised her arms imploringly to her husband. Wild emotion, cries of revenge, and screams, followed the mute silence in the courtyard. The Chiefs of the people hastened with conciliating words from one troop to another; they felt anxiously that a fire was kindled which could hardly be extinguished by sage counsel.

First Wolf was in great affliction. When he

went to his old bench comrades, who stood in a close crowd before the house of the wounded man, they gave him hostile looks, turning their backs on him.

Agino said, "He who has stood in a passage of arms against our comrade is separated from our bench; and if I may give thee good advice for the last time, it is to avoid our neighbourhood, that cold iron may not pay thee for thy treason."

"You acted shamefully to our guest," retorted Wolf, vehemently. "I have behaved myself honourably, according to my oath, which you all then extolled: how could I forsake my master in his danger amidst water and heather?"

"If thou wast his companion in the danger," replied the others, "hide thyself in his chamber, and drink among his strangers the mead that he gives thee; for hated is thy name among us, and thy memory shall be blotted out from our circle."

Hildebrand also approached him, and began solemnly, "Since thou wast a boy I have known thee, and would gladly give thee good advice if I could; but it is an old saying, 'Where the master leads, the man falls to the ground.' Even if our Prince Answald is kindly disposed towards thee, he cannot defend thee against the anger of the household. Perhaps I may persuade him to give

thee freedom from thy household oath ; then thou mayest wander with thy sword, and seek thy safety in foreign countries."

Wolf stepped aside against the wall of the court, and concealed his glowing face from the looks of his comrades.

"Is thy travelling-baggage so heavy, that thou weepest like a child, fearing to travel?" said a woman's voice near him.

Wolf answered bitterly, "That thou also mockest me, Frida, is worse than all else; for on thy account I was happy in the service of the House."

"There are other houses than this, which lie far away on the travelling-path of the hero, where a warrior wins more easily the favour of the Master, and perhaps also house and land to enable him to marry. I care not for a bench of heroes where a woman commands."

"Thou advisest me to go," answered Wolf, in great astonishment, "and thou thyself remainest here!"

"I am born for the distaff, and I must tarry till a man lifts me on his horse, and carries me to his house. But a household appears to me contemptible which first receives a guest with open arms, and is then frightened at his presence. Mount,

and trot courageously over the heather, and seek a truer lord."

"Thou hast seldom been friendly to me, Frida; yet I feel it hard to leave thee behind among the boys of the Manor," replied the honest Wolf.

"Perhaps I also may some time escape from the house," answered Frida, boldly. "If I have sometimes been hard with thee, my little Wolf, yet know that I hate the churls here, since they have denied thee comradeship."

She looked at him kindly, and disappeared, and Wolf walked back comforted to the residence of the guests.

"What do the proud boys there whisper among one another?" asked Berthar, examining him.

"They have separated themselves from me," answered Wolf, gloomily, "because I went to the meadow with King Ingo."

"And what dost thou mean to do, young Thuringian?"

"I have vowed fealty to thy lord," answered Wolf.

Berthar clasped him by the hand. "Thou speakest like a gallant man; thou hast always pleased me, for thou wast faithful in service, and kind-hearted to my comrades. Now I will take care, so far as I can, that thou dost not repent

thee of thy choice. Go, at present away from us to the Hero Isanbart that he may protect thee, and help thee by his intercession to be released from the oath which binds thee to the Chief, then return to us. The Gods have denied me a son; I will consider thee as of mine own blood, will share my last drink with thee, and my last sword-stroke shall be by thy side. Welcome amongst us, to wander over the earth, to gain booty, and to make a happy end in battle!"

Irmgard also felt the disturbance of this morning. "Where is my daughter, that she may help her mother with her medical skill?" exclaimed the Prince, by the bedside of the wounded man.

In a low tone, that no one might hear her words, the angry Princess answered, "She has disobediently refused to approach his bed."

Herr Answald went impetuously to Irmgard's room. The cheeks of the noble maiden were pallid, but her eyes did not shun the angry look of her father. "By the bedside of thy betrothed is thy place, thou cold-hearted one," he exclaimed to her.

"I should have hated myself if I had vowed my life to yonder man," answered Irmgard, unmoved.

"Thy father has done it for thee; and had I not done it, yet he is of thy family, and my com-

panion in arms. Dost thou respect so little what our customs require of thee ?”

“ I think also, my father, of what becomes thy child. He who lies there, struck by a well-deserved blow, set the hounds upon our friend and guest. Therefore, as a child of this house, he is henceforth to me a stranger and an enemy.”

“ Thou speakest like a mad woman. I know well the bad wish which befools thy heart : too long have I indulgently borne with what is intolerable.” He raised his hand against his daughter.

“ Kill me, my father,” cried out Irmgard ; “ thou hast power ; but I will never go upon my feet to the bedside of the bad man.”

“ If thou hast so decided,” exclaimed the Prince, beside himself, “ yet shalt thou bend to compulsion. I go to turn off the source which brings this trouble into my house ; and thou shalt live apart as a prisoner, till thy insolent spirit become more pliant.” He left the room, threatening, and walked across the court to his hearth-seat. There his district companions collected, and there also Ingo was conducted by two Chiefs of the people.

The countenance of the Prince was red with anger, and his voice trembled when he began

speaking to the assembly by his hearth-fire. "Thou, Ingo, Ingbert's son, hast given a death-blow to my sword-bearer, Theodulf, one of the nobles of the people, the relative of my wife, the son to whom I had promised my daughter as a wife; thou hast injured him in body and life in secret fight, which the sun hates. Thou hast wounded mine honour, violated thy duty as guest, and broken thine oath; therefore I refuse thee, henceforth, the peace of my house and manor; I dissolve the covenant which once bound our fathers; I extinguish the flame on the hearth which now still warms thee, and I pour water over that by which we had sworn to one another hospitable peace." He raised up the hearth-kettle, and poured the water into the flames, so that the steam spread itself hissing throughout the house.

But Ingo cried out, in reply, "Wounded to death in my honour, I have done a necessary deed, such as every one must do who would not live dishonoured among the people. I thought of thy hospitable hearth when the bad man lay under my sword, and I drew back its point. For the kindness that I have enjoyed under thy roof I thank thee now, on parting; from the evil that thou and thy kindred may henceforth intend

towards me I will guard myself. As thou hast extinguished the flames that lighted me hospitably, so do I throw the guest-token that thy father gave to my father, into the cold ashes of thy hearth. I renounce also the duties of guest which have bound me here, as a stranger I came, and as a stranger I go. To the Gods, the eye-witnesses of my oath, I complain of the injustice that thou doest to me and my race; and I beg their blessing for every one who wishes me well in this house and country. He turned round to depart.

Then rose Isanbart, and said, "Though thou art in hostility to our Chieftain, by a necessary deed which we honour, yet thou art not in hostility with the people who through our mouth have promised thee peace. If thou wilt tarry till the community decide upon thy quarrel with Herr Answald, thou art welcome, with thy followers, to the house and hearth of an old man who once stood in battle by the side of thy father."

Ingo stepped up to the old man, and bent low before him. "Lay thy blessing on my head, O father, before I depart. It would be inglorious for me any longer to linger in the district, and excite discord in the villages. But I shall think of thy faithfulness so long as I breathe."

The old man laid his hand silently on his head, and then Ingo passed on to the threshold. The Prince saw with anger and anxiety that a portion of his country associates rose to accompany him on his departure. Isanbart offered him his hand, and led him, with the others, through the host of armed retainers who thronged about the door with threatening demeanour; opposite to these were the Vandals, on their horses, ready for departure, and if necessary, for a fight; but the dignity of the Chiefs of the people restrained the wrath of the younger men. Ingo leaped upon his horse, which Berthar brought to him, cast one lingering look back at the house, then put his horse into a gallop through the gate of the court, and was followed by his men. When the retainers called after him threatening words, the angry voice of Isanbart commanded silence. But the Prince sat mute, with heavy thoughts, by his cold hearth.

Behind the travellers a horse's hoofs clattered on the frozen ground. Bero drew his horse up to Ingo's side, and after he had ridden by him for a while, began, "It was I who brought thy comrades to thee; to-day I would like to show thee good-will: the village in which I dwell lies on thy road; may it please thee, Hero, to turn in with me, and try peasant fare?"

"I advise thee, my lord," said Berthar, "to accept the invitation of the freeman ; for I have found him well-disposed, and a prudent counsellor."

"Thou art not the only one of thy race who has been well-disposed towards us since we were in the Prince's territory," replied Ingo, with a sorrowful smile. The Hero agreed to the visit, whereupon Bero, pleased, turned his nag along a side path.

Rothari followed them with a loud call. "Your first resting-place must be my house," exclaimed the burly man, stretching out his hand from his horse, and shaking many by the hand. "Cast thy cares behind thee, Hero, and do not be angry with all because thou hast parted with one in displeasure ;" and riding by Ingo, he continued, confidentially, "In our district also many are astonished that thy sword did not give the last honours to a wrangler ; for the man and his family have enemies among the people, because they are unjust ; and I am one of those enemies." Thus he trotted on among the guests, with comforting words, sometimes whirling his spear in the air, and relating jovial accounts of travels, till the strangers listening to him laughed.

When on the following morning the first dawn

of day shone in the dark room, Irmgard rose gently from her bed, that she might not awake her sleeping guardian, and she said to herself, "I dreamt that one was standing by the torrent above, expecting me. The bank of the running flood has been travelled over; loosened is the pine-tree which clung to our ground; down the valley it drives with the water, betwixt ice and stones, and never shall I see it again. I know not what I care for in life, since he has gone from us." She threw a dark covering round her dress, opened softly the door, and stepped into the empty court. "Who will unlock the gate for me?" she said, standing before it; but when she touched it, she found the wooden bolt of the barrier drawn out. She went through the gate, and hastened over the snow up the mountain to the place where she had formerly found her loved one. But when she came near, she perceived by the torrent, in the twilight, a tall figure; she was frightened, and stopped. Then Ingo hastened towards her. "I thought I should find you in this place, and that feeling brought me on my speedy horse through the night.

"The King rides among enemies," answered Irmgard, "because my family have broken faith with him. Bitter is the thought, and hateful is

life to me ; for thou wilt be angry with us when thou thinkest, in the hour of danger, on the hall of my father."

"I think of thee wheresoever I tarry," exclaimed Ingo ; "from thee I hope for all the welfare of my days. Thou art most dear to me, and strong is thy courage ; therefore I place to-day in thy hand the threads on which, as the Priestess said, my fate hangs." He presented to her a little pouch of otter skin, with strong straps upon it. Irmgard looked timidly at the gift. "It contains the magic dragon," continued Ingo, softly, "the victorious talisman of the Romans, as our warriors imagine, and also my fate. In the King's Castle the Romans have been distributing gold ; it is possible that the King's men may work me evil. If they kill me and my followers, the Romans shall not gain again what, as they say, ensures them the victory. Therefore keep the purple for me till I ask for it ; but if my enemies accomplish their work, then carry the talisman to the death-mound they raise over me, and bury it there deep in the earth."

Irmgard took the pouch, held it with both hands, and her tears rolled down on it. "A stranger wilt thou be to the hearth of my father, but thou remainest my guest-friend, Ingo, and

thou shalt dwell near my heart. Here I keep what thou givest me, and I pray to the Gods of fate that this pledge may win me a share in thy lot. Had I been born a boy, as my parents wish, I could follow thee on thy path; but lonely shall I sit, with closed lips, in a joyless house, and I will think of thee whom only the hawks behold, the wild birds, when they fly betwixt heaven and man's earth. For restlessly dost thou wander, noble man, to hostile walls, under wailing winds and falling rime."

"Do not sorrow, friend," said Ingo, imploringly, "for I do not fear that the enemy will succeed in killing me; if the cold snow whirls about me, my heart is glad, for I have confidence in thee whom I care for. By night and by day it will be my thought how I can win thee."

"He whom the father is angry with, and whom the mother hates, loves the child: can there be greater sorrow on earth?" said Irmgard, sadly.

He embraced her, and said tenderly, "Conceal thy love before others, as the tree conceals its strength in the earth when the summer passes away. Now the wild power of the winter-giant rages around us; the riches of the fields are covered with a white hearse-cloth. Do thou, friend, also bear quietly the icy burden. When

the buds burst, and the young green sprouts from the earth, then look out at the spring sun, and listen for the song of the wild swans as they pass through the air."

"I will conceal and wait," answered Irmgard, solemnly; "but do thou think, when the storm rages about thy head, that I am lamenting and calling to thee; and when the soft sun laughs upon thee, that I weep for thee."

She tore a ribbon from her dress, and tied it round his arm. "Thus I bind thee to me, that thou mayest know that thou belongest to me, as I do to thee;" and she threw her arms round his neck, and held him in a firm embrace.

Near them sounded the discordant cry of a bird of prey. "The watchman warns us that thou must depart from me," exclaimed Ingo: "bless me, Irmgard, that my journey may be prosperous for thee and me." He bent his head under her hands, but she held her arms around him, moved her fingers, and whispered the blessing." Then he embraced her once more, with the deep sorrow of parting, and sprang upwards into the pine-forest. Irmgard stood again alone betwixt rock and forest, and around her blew the winter snow.

Late in the morning the Vandals rode from

Rothari's house; among them was Ingo, in an elevated state of mind, although silent, for his thoughts flew back to the lady in the Prince's house. About mid-day they came to the village that is called in the country "the free moor," where stood Bero's residence. The sun shone brightly on the white covering of the earth, and the rime glittered on the heads of the willows. The bridge over the village ditch was adorned with green pine-branches, and near the watchman's house stood the country people, in festive attire, and in front of them Bero and his six sons, strong young men, with powerful limbs and large hands. Bero exclaimed, "We are the last of the district comrades who dwell along your road, and we hope to keep you warm under our thatched roofs till you ride into a foreign country." The horsemen dismounted joyfully, and walked amongst the country people in the village. "We divide the hospitality amongst us," continued Bero, "that every one of the neighbours may have the honour of a guest-friend; and if it please the young fellows, we will, after the repast, have a dance with our boys and maidens in a spacious room, or on a well swept barn-floor, as is our custom." Then he himself took the bridle of Ingo's horse, and led his noble guest through the

open gate of the courtyard. Whilst his sons unsaddled the horses, and provided them with corn, the heroes stepped in front of the house, on whose threshold Frida's mother, with her maidens, awaited the stranger, and offered her sunburnt hand. Upon the firm clay floor of the broad hall stood a table, ready laid, with wooden chairs round it; from the raised gallery in the background, blue-eyed, flaxen-headed children peeped out, and when the guests smiled at them, concealed their heads shyly behind the balustrade. "Call the guests to the repast," said the peasant to his wife, "and bring the best that you can, for they are accustomed to princely fare." Ingo invited the Hostess to sit by him, but she declined, and carried the dishes up and down herself. "That appears to me a good custom," declared Bero, "for the eyes of the Hostess see quickest what is wanting to the guests, and besides, it would sometimes be troublesome to the Host for the servants to hear the conversation."

The Hostess offered many dishes; she carried them about incessantly, and urged every one to take of them. At last the Host took the King and Berthar to his room; there the three sat down by a small table, and he gave them mugs of

strong mead, black with age, and thick as honey just dropped from the comb. "This drink was brewed by my mother when she came to this house," he said, in commendation of it. He raised his mug, drank the health of his guests, and began solemnly, "Our ancients tell us that once upon a time a God created the nobles, the free peasants, and the serfs, when he was wandering over the garden of the earth. To each he gave special gifts: to you nobles to lead the people in battle, where we follow you; to us, on the other hand, to manage the fields in summer and winter; to the serfs to work carefully with bent backs. Neither the noble nor the free peasant can do, the one without the other. You heroes could not gain fame if we did not follow you on the battle-heath, and we could not cultivate securely if you did not preserve us, by counsel and arms, from hostile neighbours. You have the most honour in battle—for seldom does the minstrel celebrate the warlike deeds of the peasant; but your life is without repose, and restlessly do the families of the nobles move about, while we dwell lastingly on our acres; and if the Host is slain, and his house burnt, yet his sons walk in the shoes of their fathers, and build and establish themselves again upon the land."

The guests were pleased with this excellent speech, and nodded their approbation.

Bero continued cautiously, "Now, ye heroes, I have during many weeks watched you, and have perceived and learnt that you think rightly, and live with good discipline; therefore I think we might well be useful to one another. Hope nothing from our nobles; many among them know not how to assist themselves; and expect nothing from the King, for he suspects and envies every one who does not serve him. Seek therefore your safety with the peasants. When I led thee, Hero Berthar, from the South, I spoke to thee a little of my secret, as one speaks to a stranger; but to-day I will fully confide in thee. I have been guest-friend, as were my ancestors, with the freemen at Idisbach. They belong to an honest people called the Marvingians. They are blood-relations to us Thuringians, but for a long time they have dwelt by themselves in the valleys by the stream of Idis—one of the mighty Weird Sisters. They have for years lost their race of Princes and their best warriors, because these became hostile to them, and went westward, among the Franks, for game and booty.

"Since then, those that remained behind have been oppressed by our settlers on the other side of

the mountains, and southward, towards the Main, by the Burgundians. The double oppression has become insupportable to them, and a portion are preparing secretly, when the trees become green again, also to travel away, and follow the Prince. Therefore in the autumn I rode over the mountains, in order to exchange horses and draught-oxen for their swine, which they could not slaughter themselves. There I saw delightful meadow land to be bought cheap, and I thought of the boys on my manor. But my guest-friends complained to me—such of them as wished to remain in the land of their fathers—that their small swarm of bees were in want of a queen bee; for they are without a race of Princes who could maintain friendship for them with the neighbours, or lead them in glorious struggles against the rapacious nobles on the boundary. But the peasants of Idisthal will not become Thuringians nor Burgundians, but keep their own customs; and would rather ally themselves to a foreign race than to our nobles; but least of all with our King. Therefore I think of thee, Hero Ingo; for there are few of you, and more of them; and you could not oppress them. There I advise you to go in the spring. Whether it will be for your welfare you must judge yourself; but to those who

would cultivate the land it would be an advantage, and therefore I counsel it to you."

"Pay attention to his speech, my King," exclaimed Berthar; "this is the best news that thou hast heard for a long time, and every word is true. I myself saw the land, and spoke with the men. We had ridden northwards from the Main, over the frontiers of Burgundy, through barren pine-woods and sandy heather: there we looked from the heights upon a wide valley, through which was a running stream, which they call the brook of the Weird Sister, the holy Idis; steep wooded hills, and on the meadows such high grass that our horses had difficulty in passing through it. There I know is a hill-slope, well suited for a King's Castle, as from a watch-tower one looks over the Idisthal, and over the forest far beyond the Main."

Ingo laughed. "Dost thou also, grey wanderer, hope for carpenter's work, and a warm seat by thine own hearth? Strange is the fate of the wanderer: the Prince sends me from his house, and the peasant offers me a country just when we are again wandering without a hold on the earth, like the clouds which drive about under the sun. Only one thing I fear, thou wise Host: I must ride through the walls of King Bisino to the Idisbach."

“Avoid the King,” said Bero, warningly; “make thy way over the boundary; thus wilt thou be clear of him.”

“Be not angry,” answered Ingo, “if I this time rush into danger like a wandering hero, and do not go round about like a settler. I have given an answer to the King’s invitation that I would come, and I will keep my word, although he is ill-disposed towards me. Even thou wilt not blame my expedition. For if I now avoid the King, he will learn my hostile feeling; and when our boys, as thou wishest, desire in the spring to form an enclosure not far from his boundary, his wrath will speedily prepare a dark fate for the settlers at Idisbach.” He seized the hand of the peasant, and continued, “In everything else I will follow thy advice; and therefore tell me now how I ought to deal with thy guest-friends about the possession of the land, that we may enter into an alliance for our spring journey.”

The heroes bent their heads, and sat long in conversation; whilst outside the shawms and bagpipes sounded, and the shouting couples went to the dance.

VII.

INGO AT THE KING'S COURT.

WOLF, who led the vanguard, stopped upon a height, and pointed with his hand to the distance. In front of the travelling band rose from the snow-covered landscape the mighty stone building, the King's Castle, with high walls, solid towers with battlements, and amidst them the red-brown tiled roof of the King's house—a fearful sight for the roving comrades. “It may be easy for birds to enter into such a cage, but it is not every one that will succeed in flying out of it,” muttered Berthar. The tones of a short horn sounded from the distant battlement. “The warders are stirring themselves; now trot, that they may perceive our eagerness.”

The strangers rode through a hollow path betwixt two rocks, up to the stone outwork which was built in front of the bridge, the top of which was garrisoned with armed men. “The

boys have closed the gates, in order to prepare themselves for our visit," exclaimed the old man, striking at the iron knocker of the door. The watchman from the top enquired their names, and what they wanted. Ingo answered. But long did the troop wait, and impatiently did the horses stamp, before the heavy creaking door opened, and the drawbridge fell to the ground. The horsemen galloped into the court of the Castle; armed men thronged at all the doors; the King's Herald met the guests; once more there were questions and answers; then the man, with clouded brow, advised them to dismount, and guided the heroes, who led their horses by the bridle, in front of the King's hall.

"Where does the Host tarry?" cried out Berthar, with much displeasure, to the Herald. "My lord is not accustomed to enter the threshold of a house before the Master of it stands there." But at the same moment the door of the hall opened, and King Bisinó stood in a circle of his nobles at the entrance; Queen Gisela by his side. Ingo ascended the steps, and bowed.

"Long have we expected thee in vain, stranger, and tardy have been the steps of thy horse from the forest to my dwelling," began the King, with a gloomy look. But immediately

Queen Gisela stepped forward; she offered her white hand to the Hero in welcome, and nodded a greeting to his followers. "When I was a child, not taller than my son here, I saw thee, my lord, in the hall of the Burgundians; but we remember past times and old friendships. Reach thy hand to thy cousin," she commanded the boy, "and take care to become a hero famous among the people, as he is."

The child held out his hand to the guest. Ingo raised up the little one, and kissed him; and the boy clung confidently round the neck of the man. Now also the King approached him. Between the royal pair Ingo walked into the hall, and exchanged words of greeting with them both, till the King commanded the Herald to take the foreign guests to their quarters. Ingo returned to his followers; the countenances of the Thuringians became more friendly; one warrior after another went up to the strangers, greeted them, and accompanied them to the apartment which was destined for the dwelling of the guests. The servants carried them food and drink, cushions and coverlets; and again the Herald came to invite Ingo to the King's repast.

It was late in the evening when Ingo, accompanied by one of the King's chamberlains and

the torch-bearer, returned to the apartment of his men. Berthar was sitting alone at the door of the apartment; he held his battle-sword between his legs; his shield was propped up against the post; his grey beard and the breastplate under the woollen coat glistened in the torchlight. Ingo dismissed the King's servants with a greeting, and Berthar placed the torch in the large socket of an iron candlestick, which towered up to the height of a man in the middle of the room. The light shone on the rows of men who were sleeping on the cushions on the floor, their swords by their sides, and their helmets on their heads, and with their coats-of-mail on. "Thou keepest true watch, father," said Ingo; how dost thou like our new Hosts?"

"They squint," said the old man, laughing. "There is a proverb that the greater the King the more savage are the fleas in the sleeping coverlet which he has prepared for the wandering guest. Meagre was the evening fare ordered by the Host, but the Queen sent wine and dainties, and thy boys lie satisfied and travel-weary by their shields. It is a roomy building," he continued, spying into the dark corners; "there, in a compartment of the gallery, the Prince's bed has been put up. Observe, my King, under the stone walls

of this gigantic Castle, this is the only wooden structure ; it stands apart, against the wall which towers above it at the back ; and if one of the King's men should at night put a torch to the wood-work, and close the door, then the hall will blaze up in flames without noise, and the crackling will not disturb the repose of the Castle gentlemen."

Ingo exchanged a significant look with the old man, and asked in a low tone, "How was the greeting of the King's men?"

"They sneak like foxes about the nest; they are little accustomed to Court manners; they boasted of the power of their ruler, and examined closely our weapons. I observe, my lord, they all hope to exchange sharp sword-blows with us. My King has at times been surrounded by enemies, but never was the enclosure so fast."

"King Bisino does not yet know what he intends to do," replied Ingo, "but the Queen is well-disposed towards us."

"None of the Court retinue boasted to me that the Queen was beautiful," replied the old man, "therefore I perceive that they are afraid of their mistress. Perhaps fear of my King will give us to-night quiet sleep. I will extinguish the torch, that its light may not betray to any spear the

sleeping-places. The first night in a dwelling is always the most full of anxiety to a guest."

"Perhaps also the last," replied Ingo. "It becomes me to watch, father; I send thee to thy bed."

"Dost thou think that the old man would sleep when thine eyes are not closed?" He brought a seat for Ingo close to the entrance, where the shadow concealed him; then he seated himself again on his stool, placed his hand on the hilt of his sword, listened to the noise in the court, and gazed some time at the starry heaven of the fresh winter night. "The stars also are sitting above there, as they say, on their silver chairs, and ward off evil from the oppressed man who looks up to them in prayer," began Berthar, piously. "I am an old trunk, and it is time that I should be felled: for thee also, my King, I have sometimes longed for a fight with noble enemies as a glorious end of thy troubles. But now I behold in the forest a good woman, who is faithfully minded towards thee; and yet I fear for thee the dark night-clouds which divide us from the starlight, and I fear the night-storm driving about this wooden roof; for in the darkness I think the King may do what his bad spirit suggests to him."

"Thou knowest, father, that we have many a time overcome cold hospitality," answered Ingo.

The old man smiled at the remembrance, and continued, "I am always pleased when the iron flies in the air, and there is a free field, and better light than from flickering wood. Yet thou speakest well, O King, for there is much that is insecure on the earth; but nothing deceives so much as anticipation before the combat. The longer one has wandered about with spear and sword, the less one cherishes thoughts concerning the end. And, in fact, I suspect that the Weird Sisters cast our lots before the fight with smiling faces. They hurl us into the greatest danger, as if in jest, and pull us out again merrily by the hairs of our head; and another time they intoxicate our minds with dreams of victory, and lay us dead on the heath. But as they try the hearts of men, at last they rejoice over us fighting boys on earth now, and later elsewhere."

This speech was interrupted by a slight whizzing, and a blow; an arrow flew out of the court towards the place where Ingo sat; the iron struck on the sword scabbard, and the arrow sank on the floor. The men remained immovable, but no cry and no attack followed the assault.

"Seek thy bed, thou fool!" exclaimed Berthar.

pointing to a dark shadow which disappeared by the houses in the darkness. He raised up the messenger of death. "The arrow is from a hunting quiver."

"It is a ware Tertullus has left behind for us," replied Ingo; "King Bisino would not send us so weak a greeting."

The heroes sat waiting, but nothing stirred again; the stars retired slowly on their chairs to the celestial vault; the King's Castle lay in darkness and deep silence. At last Berthar began: "The drunken boys of the Host lie now asleep; it is time that thou also shouldst think of rest." He went to the sleepers, and shook up the chamberlain, Wolf; the young warrior sprang nimbly to his feet, and accompanied his master to his bed; then he seized his shield and spear, and stood by the old man at the door till the first dawn of daylight appeared in the sky.

On the following day a great hunt was announced. The horses pawed the ground in the open space before the King's hall; the packs of wolf-dogs and hounds barked—with difficulty held in leashes by the strong foresters. The men collected in joyful crowds, awaiting the King. Ingo also stood with a portion of his followers, leaning on his horse, in expectation of

the departure. At last the King came, who loved the forest work still more than a good drink by the hearth; he had on a hunting dress, and a heavy hunting spear in his hand. The horns sounded the morning greeting. He approached Ingo in a friendly way, and asked aloud, "How was thy night's rest, cousin? I had not heard before that thou wast a blood-friend of the Queen's from the time of your fathers; thou art welcome as a relation also at my Court."

The King's men listened to the words, and looked with astonishment at one another. But Ingo answered respectfully, "I thank the King for greeting me so graciously."

"Come on," continued Bisino; "try the strength of thy spear by our side to-day." He mounted his horse, the gate flew open, the bridge was swung down, and the hounds started out into the open ground—behind them the horsemen. Ingo's horse also pranced joyfully, rejoicing, like his master, in having the free ground under his feet. He rode by the King, who scrutinized the noble figure and the firm strength with which Ingo restrained his powerful hunting horse. Sometimes he called him to his side, and spoke to him confidentially, as to an old comrade, so

that one of the King's boys whispered to another, "Why does the cat announce the mouse as his wife's cousin, when he holds it in his claws?"

But that was not the King's intention. He was pleased with Ingo, and besides, had heard favourable words concerning him from the Queen, and also from his young son, who was his dearest object on earth. And the King thought, he is truly a cheerful companion, and it makes one glad to see him; why should I not show him kindness, so long as I can keep him among the living? There are others whose death would be more convenient to me. Thus his graciousness came really from his heart, and he listened with amusement to Ingo's account of the strength of a lion which he had seen in a cage of the Alemann King's.

Soon the hunting companions entered into a higher oak wood. Hitherto the eyes of the Queen had looked after them from the battlements of her tower. Now she called to her chamberlain and women, and descended into the empty court. She stopped, to the astonishment of her attendants, at the kitchen, and spoke a few words about the roast for the feast to the cook, who seldom enjoyed such an honour, and gladly promised to employ his best skill in preparing

the dishes for the hunting repast. When she came to the hall where the strangers lodged, she heard the strokes of a hammer. Berthar was sitting at the door, sharpening the iron of his spear with a hammer on a stone, and singing, in a low tone, a good incantation for sharp iron. The Queen stopped, made a sign of command to her followers to retire, and stood near the steps, watching the man at his work; till at last the latter looked up, threw away his skin apron and the hammer, and approached the Queen, doing homage. "What game dost thou think of slaying with thy iron, Hero of King Ingo?" inquired Queen Gisela, "that thou remainest in the Castle whilst the hounds are running outside?"

"I am sharpening my store for another hunting cry," replied Berthar; "reports of the King's pleasure in hunting are far spread in the land."

"Unwillingly will thy lord do without his old companion in the forest."

"My master can easily slay the game which springs in the light of the sun, with only his boys; I will not fail him at the wolf-chase in the night."

The Queen fixed her eyes upon him, and went some steps nearer. "'Tis not for the first time that

I see thee, Berthar; since then the white hairs have come upon thy head, but I know thee again."

"Uncertain is the memory of the old: I have seen many people since my lord has wandered homeless. The sparks flew into mine eyes when my house in my native land was burned, so that I do not recognize the beautiful face before me."

"Thou hast reason to be angry, old man, with my family. The father of thy King and mine once formed an alliance, but my brother Gundomar forgot his old oath; he fought as an ally of your enemies on the Oder, and I, whilst still a child, was sent to be wife to the King of Thuringia. Dost thou know me now, Berthar?"

"The twig grows to be a proud tree; other birds sing now in its foliage than did in former times."

"Yet the tree bears every year the same blossoms; and the old battle-hero finds a friend in the Queen. Art thou contented with thy dwelling in the Castle? and have the King's boys offered thee a courteous greeting?"

"At Court the servants greet like their master; thy favour, O Queen, is surety for the good-will of thy people."

The countenance of the Queen became clouded

"That is the speech of a proud guest," she continued, with a constrained smile; "I think thy life was more merry in the forest huts."

"We are wanderers, lady. A flexible mind helps him who wanders homeless among the people; a house and wife are denied him, and he takes what the day offers him,—booty, drink, and women; he has no choice, and no griefs; and without anxiety he thinks in the evening of the work of the following day."

The old man saw that the Queen again smiled. She approached nearer to him, and said, "There in the tower is the Queen's chamber; if thou shouldst ever look up at that window, from thy spear, a light will perhaps burn there which will warn thee beforehand of the wolf-chase." She nodded to him, and turned to her followers; but the old man looked at her with astonishment; then seizing his hammer, recommenced knocking.

On the following night no arrow and no barking of the King's wolves disturbed the sleep of the foreign guests. Every day the King became more friendly to them, and extolled before his men their Court manners and their art of managing their horses in the war-games. Hermin, the King's young son, came often to the dwelling of his cousin Ingo, exercised himself before him with

his child-weapons, stroked the grey beard of the Hero Berthar, and begged for a merry tale. One hunting morning Ingo became still more agreeable to the Host than he had been before. The King, in his hunting eagerness, had ridden far before the others, and had fallen from his horse on a steep mountain; from thence he slid down on to the ice, and lay for a moment defenceless before the horns of a wild ox. Then sprang Ingo, at the risk of his own life, over the body of the King, and killed the raging beast. The King rose, and limping from his fall, said, "Now that we are alone, and none of my men near, I perceive thy good disposition; for if thou hadst not sprung like a hound, the furious beast would have hurled himself on me, to the damage of my ribs, and no one could have reproached thee. What I know, no one else need know."

That day the King sat joyfully on his royal seat at the repast, next his wife Gisela, and Ingo on the other side. "To-day I rejoice in the good fortune of the chase; I rejoice in my power and the gold treasures that you all see before your eyes; and I drink to the health of the Hero Ingo, because he was a good comrade in fight with the mountain ox. Rejoice, all of you, to-day with me, when you see the gold and silver cups

which are placed before your eyes, to my honour and yours. Thou, Ingo, hast visited many Courts of powerful rulers: tell me, Hero, whether thou hast seen better vessels from any of their treasure-houses."

"Gladly do I praise thy wealth, O King; for when the treasure-house is filled, we think the ruler governs in security, feared by hostile neighbours and bad men among the people. There are two virtues which I have always heard extolled in a powerful sovereign: understanding to collect treasure at the right time, and to distribute it at the right time to his faithful servants, that they may follow him in danger."

These words were quite in accordance with the opinion of the heroes who sat at the King's table, and they nodded, and murmured approbation.

"The Alemanni also were a wealthy people, till Cæsar devastated their land," continued Ingo; "but I think they will regain much, for they are active after booty, and understand how to deal with traders. Therefore they live more like Romans than other country people; the peasants also dwell in stone houses; the women embroider coloured pictures on their dresses; and round them hang sweet grapes in vine arbours."

"Dost thou know the Roman women also?" asked the Queen; "the King's men relate many wonderful things of their beauty, although they have brown skins and black hair."

"They are nimble in speech, and in the movements of their limbs, and the greeting of their eyes is pleasing; only I heard that they could not boast of the propriety of their conduct," replied Ingo.

"Hast thou been in Roman land?" asked the King, inquisitively.

"It is two years," said Ingo, "since I rode as companion of the young King Athanarich peacefully into the walls of the great Imperial city of Treves. I saw high arches and stone walls, as if erected by giants. The people laughed in crowded throngs in the street; but the warriors who stood there at the gates, with Roman tokens on their shields, have our eyes, and speak our language, although they wrongly boast of being Romans."

"The strangers give us their wisdom, they sell us gold and wine, but we lend them power of limb; I approve of the exchange," replied Hadubald, to whom it was not pleasant to hear the Roman service despised.

"But I, O King," began Berthar, "have little

respect for that wisdom of the Romans. I also was formerly in the great stone castle which the Romans have built; first, when my lord Ingo sent me southwards over the Danube to Augsburg, where now the Swabians have established their home. I rode in with difficulty over the broken city walls; there I saw much folly which is annoying even to a wandering man. The Roman houses stood as thickly packed as a flock of sheep in a thunderstorm. I saw none where there was room for a court, nay, even for a dunghill. I asked my Host, and he said, 'They squat, if needs be, shamelessly, like little dogs in the street.' I lay in such a stone hole; the walls and the floors were smooth, and shone with many bright colours. The trusty Swabians had arranged a straw roof as a covering. I assure you it was uncomfortable betwixt the stone walls during the night; and I was glad in the morning when the swallows sang in the straw. It had rained in the night, and in a puddle on the floor I saw by the morning light two ducks, not bodily, but as if painted on the stone of the floor. I went up to it, stuck my axe into the stone floor, and found a ludicrous work put together of many little stones; every stone was cemented to the floor, and above polished as

fine as a stone axe. From such coloured stones were the birds made which we know as ducks; and it was a work over which many men must have been occupied many days, only to polish the hard stone. That appeared to me quite foolish, and my Swabian thought so also."

"Perhaps the duck is a holy bird to them, which is not domestic there; there are some kinds of birds to be found all over the earth, and others not," said Balda, a sensible man, one of the followers of the Queen.

"So I thought also, but my Host knew that they prepare the like things for their pleasure, in order to tread upon them."

The men laughed. "Do not our children also make little bears out of clay, and ovens out of sand, and play for days together with trifles? The Romans have become like children," exclaimed Balda.

"Thou speakest right. They have polished little stones into birds, whilst in their forest the warriors of Swabia dwell in their block-houses; also when they eat they lie down like women who are lying-in."

"What thou bringest forward concerning the ducks," exclaimed Wolfgang, in an angry tone, "is quite unimportant and foolish; for it is

peculiar to the Romans that they can imitate everything in coloured stone—not only birds, but also lions and fighting warriors. They understand how to form every God and every hero, so that he stands up as if living; this they do as an honour to themselves, and as a memorial to him.”

“They rub upon the stones; and the heroes who fight their battles are of our own blood. If it is their fashion to love journeyman’s work, it is ours to rule over journeymen. I do not praise the hero who engages himself in the service of a journeyman,” replied the old man.

“Dost thou call journeymen those who are lords over almost the whole earth? Their race is older, and their traditions more glorious than ours,” exclaimed Wolfgang again.

“If they have prated to thee of that,” retorted Berthar, “they have lied: whether the glory is genuine, and the tradition true, may be known to every one by this—if it increases the courage in battle of those men who boast. Therefore I compare the fame of the Romans to a waterspout, that first rushes over the land, and then dries up into a puddle; but the fame of our heroes is like a mountain spring, which rushes over the stones, and carries its floods into the valley.”

"Yet the wise men of the Romans are confident," interposed Ingo, "that they have become more powerful than they were before; for they boast that in the times of their fathers a new God came into their empire, who has given them victory."

"I have long observed," said the King, "that they have a great mystery in their Christ. Their faith also is not entirely frivolous, for they are in truth now more victorious than in former times. One hears much about it, and no one speaks very accurately."

"They have very few Gods," declared Berthar, mysteriously, "or perhaps only one with three names. One is called the Father, the other the Son, and the other is called the third."

"The third is called the Devil," exclaimed Wolfgang. "I know that; I myself was at one time among the Christians; and I assure thee, O King, their magic is more powerful than any other. I learnt their secret sign, and a blessing—they call it *Noster Pater*—that has healing power against every bodily injury;" and he made respectfully a cross over his wine-cup.

"Yet, according to my judgment," replied Berthar, obstinately, "the day will come even to the Romans, in spite of their walled cities, and in

spite of their new Gods, and in spite of their skill in stone ducks, when they will learn that elsewhere there live stronger men, who build their wooden roofs in the free air."

"But to us the skill of the Romans is useful also," said the King, decisively; "it is an honour for a king to make use of what others have cleverly invented. Yet I am pleased with thy words, Hero Berthar, for he is a sensible man who thinks higher of his own people than of foreigners."

When the repast was ended, and the King sat alone at his glass with Ingo, he began loquaciously, "I see, Hero, that the Weird Sisters have attached to thee much suffering at thy birth, but also many good gifts; for they have ordained that the hearts of men shall open in friendship to thee. I also, when I hear thee speak, and when I observe how thou bearest thyself among my men, would like to be well-disposed towards thee. Only one thing troubles my spirit, that thou hast dwelt among my peasants in the forest huts, whose minds have always been hostile to me; and I fear that thy abode there has been to my injury."

"My King has no reason for anxiety," answered Ingo, earnestly; "I am not likely again to rest by the hearth of Herr Answald."

“Did oath and comradeship come to so rapid an end?” asked the King, with satisfaction. “Can I believe thee, when thou announcest to me a thing so strange? tell me, if it pleases thee, what has separated thee from him.”

“Unwillingly does a Host tolerate foreign lodgers on his property,” said Ingo, evasively.

“The mutual confidence of masters compels the men also to keep the peace,” answered the King. “Thou dost not tell me all, and therefore I cannot trust thee.”

“If the King will graciously swear to me on his sword that the reason of my quarrel shall remain secret between us both, I will tell him the truth; for thy suspicions would be injurious to me, and I hope for benefit from thy goodwill.” The King raised his sword quickly, held the oath-finger over it, and promised. “Well then, know, O King, that the noble maiden, Irmgard, is dear to me, and that her father is angry with me on that account, as he has promised her in marriage to the family of the Hero Sintram.”

The King laughed with much satisfaction. “Thou wast wrong, Ingo, though thou art an expert warrior, to desire the daughter of the Chieftain. How could the father give the hand

of the daughter who is his inheritress to the disinherited stranger? The whole people would reproach him as mad; it would be insufferable that a foreigner should sit as Chieftain of the forest arbour. Nay, if the father himself should promise thee his daughter amidst a circle of witnesses, I, the King, could never suffer it, and I should have to send my boys, both horse and foot, in order to hinder you."

Ingo looked so fiercely at the King that he laid hold of his weapon. "Thou speakest hostile words to the banished man. Much suffering have I borne as guest in the Chieftain's household, but it is difficult for the spirit of man to hear words of contempt, and I think that the noble mind of the King should not wound the pride of an unfortunate one."

"I am better disposed towards thee than I ever was before," replied the King, cheerfully. "But dost thou still maintain a hope to overcome the anger of the father?"

"The Prince is bound by his oath, and the family of Sintram is powerful in the forest; the wife of the Prince, also, is of his kindred."

The King thumped upon his wine-mug, as was his wont when anything was in accordance with his wishes. "It would be most agreeable to me

to marry the noble maiden to one of my men ; it would not be welcome to me for the family of Sintram ever to get the property and treasures of the Prince into his power, for I know his malicious mind. But it would be most repugnant to me for thee, with the good-will of the father, to become his son-in-law ; for as the scent of the honey entices the bears to the forest tree, so would the praises of the minstrel collect in thy Court all combat-loving fists—Vandals and other straggling men ; and thou wouldst, as a ruler of Thuringians, soon become hostile to me, even if thou didst not wish it. Bethink thee of this,” concluded the King, persuasively, filling with his own hand the glass of his guest. “ Drink, Hero Ingo, and enjoy thyself. When the wolves banquet on the forest hearths, then let them extol the guest-friendship of thy sword, which prepares for them a rich repast ; but do not think any more of befooling my Thuringians in the forest arbour by guest-banqueting.”

“ Then do thou also hear, O King, the counsel of the stranger,” cried out Ingo, indignantly : “ do not thou think to marry the noble maiden to another man ; for as long as I can move an arm, no other shall take her to his house. Already has Theodulf once been stretched on the meadow

by my sword ; it was an accident that he escaped death : I bar the bridal path to him, and equally to any one of thy people."

Now the King laughed so loud that he shook with it. "The longer thou speakest, the more I love to hear thee, even though thou talkest defiantly to me. Thou thinkest after the fashion of a travelling hero, and I am confident that thou wilt show thyself so in deeds. Constrain the father, lay Theodulf, the bombastic fool, on the bloody heath, and carry off thy wife to thy bridal bed. With all my heart I will give my aid that all this may be successful to thee."

Ingo examined suspiciously the demeanour of the King, who sat so joyful before him, thinking that perhaps the wine had distracted his thoughts, and he said, "The meaning of thy words, my lord, is concealed from me ; thou praisest and blamest me for the same thing. How canst thou be glad to hear what appears to thee insufferable ? and how canst thou help in a wooing which thou thyself wilt hinder, even if the bride's father does not do so ?"

But King Bisino replied with dignity, "Sit down again to thy drinking-horn. Much which brings a man to honour is thine, but the most difficult of all thou canst not gain. Thou hast not

a King's skill. Thy thoughts hasten straight forward, as the hound on the track of the deer. But a King cannot be simple-minded, either in his favour or his revenge; he must think of many things; he cannot fully trust any one, and he must know how to use every man for his own advantage. Thus I would grant the noble maiden, Irmgard, rather to thee than to many others,—the maiden, understand me, but not her inheritance, and not the dominion in the forest arbour after the death of her father." Ingo seated himself beside him, and bent his head obediently to hear further. "Since I have been King," continued the other, "my authority has been insecure through the audacity of the forest people, and the power of their Prince, Herr Answald; and long have I sought an opportunity to become their master. Therefore thou wast insupportable to me in the forest arbour, because thou mightest become a leader of their bands. And if thy Vandal brood were to be established round the Prince's seat, I should have to destroy thee as mine enemy, even though I were well-disposed towards thee. Bethink thee of that, Hero! Yet if thou gain the daughter by a deed of violence, as an enemy of the father—as heroes are wont to do when their desire leads

them to it—the child in heritress will disappear from the house, and I need not fear that the dominion should pass to another race of Princes. Dost thou now understand what I mean, headstrong Ingo?”

“I desire the noble maiden, and not the Prince’s seat in thy land. But it would be bitter to me that my wife should lose her birthright because she has married me.”

“Leave that to me,” replied the King, coldly. “If thou choose to take the woman with thee into a foreign country, I will be a good comrade on thy side; only thou must not compel me, as King, to maintain the right of the country against thee. Hero Ingo, see that thou gain thy wife by a daring deed, and I will extol thee.”

“If thou grant me the wife, O King, grant me also a castle or house, in which I can conceal her from pursuers,” cried out Ingo, laying hold of the King’s hand imploringly.

King Bisino knitted his brows, but at last there was an honest kindness in his mien as he answered, cautiously: “My King’s skill again compels me to deny thee thy request. How can I resist the cry of the whole country, if I conceal thee? If I could help thee secretly, I would do it willingly, from meaning well to thee, and because it is useful to me. But do thou consider how I

can help thee by counsel and secret deed. Only I cannot open my treasure-house to thee; for I must keep armlets and Roman coins for myself, that I may obtain warriors in time of need."

"The great Host of the people shows his graciousness when he distributes his treasures, or holds his King's shield over the oppressed. How will the King help me, if he deny me both?" asked Ingo, undeceived.

King Bisino screwed up his eyes, and nodded slyly. "The King closes his eyes as I do now: let that satisfy the Hero." Although indignant, Ingo could not help smiling at the broad face of his Host, who squinted at him out of the corners of his eyes; and the King was pleased with his smile. "It is all right; and now cast off the cares that trouble thee, and pledge me—for I would rather drink with thee than with any other, since I know that the young bear has no better hole to creep into than my cage. Therefore I will now confide to thee a secret. The Roman Tertullus has lately whispered to me divers things, and made a high offer, if I would deliver thee to Cæsar. And when thou camest hither I did not feel very favourably disposed towards thee; but now that I know thee as thou art, I would rather keep thee for myself."

VIII.

THE LAST NIGHT.

AROUND the towers of the King's Castle raged the primæval strife of the winter giants against the good Gods who protect the increase on man's earth. The hard powers raised a grey roof of clouds betwixt the light of heaven and the earth; they oppressed also the Hero Ingo with dark thoughts and anxious cares for the welfare of her who was dear to him. The storm-spirits drove the snowflakes through the crevices of the building, upon the bed-coverlet of the guest; even the warrior, who wore his bearskin, felt the sharp tooth of the frost, and pressed close, during the day, to the hearth-fire in the hall of the Host, and sang sorrowfully, "The time of snow is suffering to the travelling hero; then his best friend is the pine log. The ungracious enemies of life separate the stream from the free air by a heavy covering of ice, and angrily does

the Nixy, who makes her home in the deep, strike and hammer from underneath against the crystal burden." But what stirred under the icy covering which concealed the thoughts of the Queen, no one knew; she alone sat quiet among the quarrelling men; unvaried was her cold friendliness to the strangers: only the King imagined that Frau Gisela spoke less haughtily than formerly. When the north wind howled its death-song round the King's towers, then Bisino sometimes murmured against his guests; but his liking for the stranger always again overcame his vexation; and whenever a ray of sun gave a rosy colour to the covering of snow, he exclaimed, "I approve of this winter; for I hear good words on my royal bench and in the room." In addition to the hunting excursions, which were arranged by the King for the Hero, there was also a warlike expedition against a district of Saxony. In this the Vandals rode with the King's men; and when the heroes returned home victorious, and laden with booty, the King loudly extolled Ingo's good sword, and the boys sat, after that, patiently with the strangers on their benches.

The snow melted under the spring sun; fresh green sprouted up on the earth; the brown

catkins hung on the birch and hazel trees ; in the souls of men also stirred the hopes of a new life, and a wish for a ride out in the country from the winter roof. The first wandering birds flew back from the south, and with them the minstrel Volkmar. He told in the King's hall of the past fights of Gods and Heroes, and sang low in Ingo's ear of the sorrow and longing of a forest bird. Then he related that in the forest harbour discord and hard speeches disturbed the minds of the wise men. Theodulf was still ailing in the house of the Prince ; Sintram's kindred were powerful there ; and Herr Answald ruled ill-temperedly over his companions, and had asked the minstrel to the marriage of his daughter in the month of May. But also from the King's Castle confidential greetings passed to the forest. Wolf received leave of absence to his home ; before his journey he spoke secretly with his lord and Berthar, rested on the road at the houses of Rothari and Bero, and rode with Bero along little-frequented forest paths southwards to the Main. When he returned, there were glad looks in the dwelling of the guests.

At last the ice covering of the stream gave way, and the flood poured with great force over the young green of the meadows ; its rapidly

swollen waters roared, and men observed with fear its ungovernable power. But the east wind rose against it with a strong blast; it subdued the flood, and dried the ground on the borders of the forest hills. The falconer had reared for the King's son two young buzzards, for the chase of little birds, and Hermin one morning begged permission of his father to go on a riding excursion, in order to try the skill of the feathered hunters.

The King's horse was already saddled for the hawking, when suddenly a messenger galloped into the court, bearing tidings which brought a dark shadow over the brow of the King. He ordered his horse to be led back, and sent his son, with the Queen and the Hero Ingo, up to the hills. The sun shone bright and warm, and Ingo rode for the first time next the Queen, without her retinue, in the open country. The falconer loosened the hood of the buzzard; the young King hunted with the Hero Balda and his attendants, shouting under the bird. The Queen followed more slowly, with glowing cheeks; she made her fiery horse prance, and smiled on her attendant, who was pleased with the beautiful woman by his side, and watched with anxiety the leaps of her horse. Once,

when he caught her bridle with a helping hand, the Queen stopped, and said—

“I think of the days when thou didst the same service to me as a child, when we rode together, far from here, over the bright flowers; then I sat in terror, but I would not let thee remark it.”

“Thy face was rounder that day, my royal cousin,” said Ingo, merrily, “and the locks shorter which curled round thy head. But when I met thee here in the hall, and the King reminded me so kindly of old times, then I recognized the proud mien and the face of the little maiden; and I saw well that I had to thank thee that favour was shown me in the King’s Castle.”

The Queen laughed, and again made her horse prance wildly about, till the horsemen in front of her disappeared behind an undulation of the ground; then she stopped again, and said cordially, “Thank me always, Ingo, for I like to hear that thou valuest me. We have both been scared away from our homes into foreign countries, since the hatred of my family divided us. But I have never forgotten thee, and have enquired after thee whenever a wanderer came from the south to the Castle. Thou becamest to me like a brother in misfortune, and I learnt

with pride how nobly thou didst bear thyself under a hard fate. Since thou hast at last penetrated to us, I have been happier than formerly."

She looked at him so kindly, that, carried away by the magic of her look, he caught at her hand; she stretched it out to him, and turning her face towards him, rode thus for a time close to him. Then she haughtily drew her hand back, galloped her horse, wildly bounding over the field, and looked back to see whether he was following her. Again she said, laughing, "Another would think of keeping thee, like a hunting falcon, under the hood, but I well see that the eagle soars freely on high, and takes its own path in the sunlight. For thou, cousin, art not born to be the servant of another; and he who would hold thee fast should look to it that thy talons do not wound him."

When the Queen began her confidential talk, the Hero thought of saying something to her about the forest arbour, which always occupied his heart, but the words and the eyes of the Queen prevented him. At last she said, with a changed tone, "And yet once the noble falcon rested with bound wings in the house of the peasant. I praise the folly of the father for having broken the

inglorious tie ; for it befits thee to desire what is highest. Only some bold deed of violence can raise thee above the heads of others : think thereof, Ingo. Let us join my son ; I rejoice that the child confides in thee ; I cannot wish him any better teacher than thee for all hero-work."

Again she galloped on before him ; her royal mantle and her locks floated in the wind ; she threw the small short spear that she held in her hand up before her in the air, and caught it in its course ; but Ingo now remained behind her, till both of them joined the hunting party, and shouted to the struggling buzzard, which sank down with a water-hen in its claws.

When the hunting party returned to the King's Castle, they found there an unusual disturbance : horsemen came and went ; the servants were carrying carpets and cushions into the stone house, which was appointed for distinguished guests ; from the King's hall resounded the clang of weapons and the clattering of the feet of many horses. Ingo sprang from his horse, and went with the young King's son to the sleeping apartment of the Vandals ; and Berthar hastened towards him. " Whilt thou hast been out looking after the hawk, another bird of prey has descended into the King's Court. Cæsar has sent a new

message; and who dost thou think came as messenger? The wildest fellow out of the Roman army, the Frank Harietto, whom they call the army destroyer—he who in one night, in the forest, cut off the heads of the plundering Saxons, and carried them to the town like cabbage-heads. Even before he came the King was pacing gloomily through the court; he answered my greeting with embarrassment, and the King's boys looked with contempt at us, and avoided our companionship. A chamberlain of the King just now came to our dwelling, and stammeringly announced that he was to bring thy repast here, that thou mightest not meet the Roman at the King's table."

"If not at the meal, let it be in the court," replied Ingo; "we do not conceal our faces from the monster; if I am the object of his errand, it is good that we should learn it early. Come, cousin," he exclaimed to the King's son, "let us see how the strangers ride, and how the King greets the Roman messengers."

The child went with him through the court into the large space in front of the King's hall. There stood the strangers with their horses, whilst the King presented the most distinguished of his retinue to the ambassador, who stepped

from man to man, bestowing upon them a warrior's greeting, and occasional words. The Roman Frank towered almost by a head above the tallest of the King's boys. He stood like a giant there, with broad shoulders and powerful limbs, his arms covered with circlets, and with a gold figure of the Emperor on the front of his coat-of-mail; his bushy eyebrows bristled from under his helmet, his look was sullen, and his courtly smile was scarcely perceptible.

As Bisino made a turn with his guest, he suddenly met Ingo, who silently greeted the King, and led the boy towards him. The King seized quickly the hand of his son. But the look of the stranger was riveted on Ingo, and involuntarily his hand moved to his sword, as if he were thinking of slaying the enemy of his lord at once. Yet Ingo approached him with a greeting, and began, "When we last saw each other, Hero Harietto, it was on a hot day: thy look was more honourable when thou didst brandish thy sword against me on the bloody battle-field, than here, where the will of a foreign lord restrains thy hand from greeting."

"I would gladly say, Hero Ingo, that I would be pleased to meet thee, but I stand here as the messenger of the great Roman Emperor; and his views towards thee are not friendly."

"I cannot think well of the message," answered Ingo, "which prevents a valiant man from greeting, under the King's protection, a war-comrade with whom he once exchanged honourable blows."

"The angry Gods have cast thee and me from our homes into hostile battle-ranks; we both follow the oath that binds us," said the Frank.

"Thou followest the banner of the stranger; I the call of our countrymen."

"In the camp of the Romans the minstrel sings the same song as here in the country," retorted Harietto.

"The songs I heard as a boy taught me to avoid the sway of strangers," replied Ingo.

"Let all come to Cæsar's banner; then we are all Romans."

"Thou callest all who stand here, Harietto; only one I think thou dost not invite; and therefore be not angry if I consider it unsuitable to bend my neck before the tribunal of Cæsar."

Both inclined their heads proudly, and stepped apart. But the King's men had thronged near, murmuring assent as they interchanged speeches—stronger when Harietto spoke; yet Ingo's words met also with approbation, and he saw that at his last speech the King himself nodded his head.

The ambassador walked with the King to the hall, where his attendant displayed the presents of Cæsar. The King beheld with joy the vases and goblet, with their wonderful work of inlaid jewels, and assured the messenger he was a friend of Cæsar's, and ready to do him much good service. Then Harietto desired to have secret converse with the King; and when all listeners had been sent away, the Frank demanded the delivery of Ingo.

Bisino was startled; he sat long reflecting, and replied at last, that the demand was too hard for him, and he needed time to give an answer; meanwhile, the ambassador would, he hoped, be pleased to stay as guest at his court. But Harietto pressed for a rapid decision; he offered still higher presents, and threatened. This roused the King's pride, and he exclaimed angrily, that what he had refused to a friendly request he would certainly not grant to a threat. Thus he left the stranger, who established himself, with his followers, among the King's boys, drank with them, and distributed presents.

But King Bisino continued much disturbed; at last he went to his treasure-room, seated himself on a stool, inspected once more, with a heavy heart, the new presents; then counted

over his strings of golden armlets, his large dishes and tankards, his golden goblets and drinking-horns. With some trouble he raised a silver dish, and viewed his face in it, and spoke sorrowfully to himself. "Morose is the picture that I see. The stranger has brought me rich presents, although the largest vase is only silver-gilt, and no praiseworthy gift to the King of a great nation. Yet I should be unwilling to lose the other gifts of which he speaks; and the Roman will not give them to me if I do not deliver yonder man to him, living, or perhaps dead. But if I bring this ill deed upon my life, and hand him over to his enemies, I shall become an object of horror to all nations, as a hireling of the foreigner, because I gave over a guest-friend to a dishonourable death. Besides, I am also sorry for the fellow; for he is good-hearted and honourable, and a faithful comrade at the cup and on horseback. On the other hand, if I keep him in spite of the Romans, I am threatened with destructive work on my boundary; the war will perhaps deprive me of my treasures, diminish the strength of the people, and shake my throne." His look fell upon a sword, which hung over the shining metal on the wall. "This is the King's weapon of my

race, renowned in song, and feared among the people ; many a heavy deed has it done : according to tradition, a God once hammered at the steel ; I am surprised that now I cannot turn my eyes from it." And sighing, he continued, " I have drunk with him, hunted and fought by his side, and I wish that his end may be glorious, like that of his father, who hastened to receive the death-wound on his breast. If I cannot save him, I will at least show him a King's honour."

The King rose, and seized the weapon. Then he felt his arm gently laid hold of ; he shrank back, and drew the sword. Before him stood Queen Gisela, and looked at him mockingly. " Will the King go to the field with his table-vessels, as he reviews them like an army ? "

" Where does the King's power lie, if not in his treasures ? " retorted the King, angrily. " How can I hold fast covetous minds, and win their fealty, if I do not distribute the foreign metal amongst them ? There is little enough of it in my country, and all ask for it : where shall I get it, if I do not obtain it from the foreigner ? "

" Does the King wish to bargain with the Romans about this man ? " asked the Queen, her eyes flaming with fire.

" Should I hesitate if I meant to do it ? " mur-

mured the King. "But this stranger sits like an owl upon my trees ; all the birds of the air shout at and scream against him. Not long ago the Kings of the Oder also sent to demand his person."

"Thou dost not deceive me," broke forth the Queen, with fierce anger. "See to it, O King ! if thou canst live after such shame, I will not. To the perjured man, who sells his sworn comrade for Roman gold, I refuse all companionship at table and bed."

The King looked askance at her. "Thy thoughts storm violently, I think, Frau Gisela ; they miss the mark."

"Who is more zealous for the King's honour than the Queen ?" answered the woman, striving for composure. "If thou dost not venture to keep him from the Romans, let him go from thy court. It is better to show thyself weak than faithless."

"In order that after such an indignity he may live as my enemy," said the King.

"Bind him, then, by a high oath ; he is, as I think, one of those who keep their oaths."

"Will the Queen so persuade him that he will never think of the indignity ?" asked the lord of the Castle, watching her suspiciously.

"I will," replied Frau Gisela, with a faltering voice, "if it is useful to the King."

They stood opposite to each other, with dark thoughts. At last the King began. "In time of danger quick deeds are useful. Make a trial, Gisela; send him a message this evening, asking him to a secret conference in thy tower. Perhaps thou mayest help him there to a good departure."

The Queen looked down; her face was pallid as she answered, "I will advise him to depart, as thou commandest it." She turned quickly from the King, and he looked after her gloomily.

In the evening the Queen was waiting in her apartment in the tower; the night-songsters sat on the wall, and lamented over the evil which was preparing for some one; the wax tapers flickered under the sharp gusts of air which penetrated through the open window, and shifted the shadow of the beautiful woman here and there on the wall. Queen Gisela stood in the middle of the room in festive attire, her red diadem upon her brow, her pale head bent forward, and her hands clenched fast, as if for some violent deed. "If thou depart from here, Ingo, it will be a pain to me worse than death; and if thou remain, then, of three who live here, there will be one too many." She shrank within her-

self, and listened again; from below there sounded a murmur of voices and a slight clash of weapons. Then she tore the taper from the high candlestick, and held it out of the window, so that the smoke and the glaring flame floated over the battlements of the tower, and the owls flew away frightened. A few minutes afterwards a single hunting-call answered from the distance; the Queen took the light back, and pushed the tapestry before the opening of the window.

A man's step sounded on the stone staircase. "It is he," she said in a low tone. But when the door opened, she started back, for King Bisino entered. His countenance was gloomy, his robust body was covered with a coat of mail, his head with a steel cap; on the handle of his sword a blood-red stone gleamed in the light. "The Queen is attired as if for a high festival," he said, angrily.

"Thou didst wish it."

"I will also be an invisible witness of thy conference with him, that thou mayest say all that I have commanded. Listen to this warning: at the foot of the tower tarry two of my boys with hard hands; if he descend without me, he will not pass the threshold alive."

"The King is truly careful," answered Frau

Gisela, motionless. Then her look fell upon the King's sword, and she cried out, "The stone on the King's knife shines bloodily; it is the death-weapon of thine ancestors." With difficulty mastering her terror, she continued, "From the apartment of the Queen, formerly, men's swords were excluded. Why has the King transgressed my rights?"

"It is only foresight, Gisela," replied the King, grimly. He walked to the end of the room, opened a little side-door, and disappeared behind it.

The Queen stood again alone, and her thoughts were in wild tumult. "The King in his lurking-place meditates an act of violence, and I shall be the helper of an unworthy deed."

Then the step of another sounded outside, and Ingo entered, without armour or a sword. "I thank thee, cousin Gisela," he began cordially, "for having to-day opened thy tower to me." He looked at the splendid room, at the embroidered tapestry on the wall, and costly articles from foreign lands. "Since I lost my mother, I have never entered the state-chamber of a Queen. Why dost thou stand so solemnly, cousin?" he continued sorrowfully: "forgive me if I do not rejoice, as I ought, in the honour thou doest me

in receiving the poor Ingo in Queen's attire." He seized her hand; in spite of her anguish a bright colour passed over her pale countenance, as she drew her hand back.

"The entrance to the Queen's chamber is easier than the passage out of the tower door," she said, in a low tone.

"I saw the King's boys lurking about," said Ingo, "and that does not surprise me, for I know that the mind of the King, who was formerly kind to me, has been excited against me by Harietto; therefore I beg thee to take care, as far as thou canst, that no shame may befall me. I am weary, Queen, of my earthly lot; I have given offence to every guest-friend—miserable everywhere, like a mad wolf, hunted from Court to Court. Such a life is contemptible, for I feel I am worthy of a better fate; and I myself mean to take care that I shall not be bound, as a living man, by Roman fetters. But if thou canst not avert my fate, then, I pray thee, preserve my blood-comrades—the wandering band—from an inglorious death. Gladly would they fight against any one, whoever it might be; but they fear a destruction which may approach them invisibly, for we are fast hemmed in between stone walls."

The Queen fixed her eyes, speechless, on the concealed door; suddenly she gave a violent scream, for the King came out, and exclaimed, "Thou hast caged thyself for thy last wound." With raised sword the King rushed against Ingo, but Frau Gisela sprang like a lioness between them, turning away his arm, so that the sword fell clattering to the ground. Ingo seized the weapon, and brandishing it, exclaimed, "Thy life is in my hand, King Bisino; little would thine armour avail thee, if I did by thee as thou hast thought of doing by me. Thank the God in whom thou trustest that the guest-oath is more sacred to me than to thee." And he threw the King's weapon before his feet. A slight sound, like the groaning of a woman, was heard in the room.

The King looked wildly around him. "Thou speakest like a man; come, then, take thy sword from the steps; we will fight."

"I have sworn peace to thee," answered Ingo, immovable.

"And I to thee," replied the King. "The oath is broken; thou art free: raise thy weapon."

"I will not fight against thee for my life," replied Ingo; "thy King's head is sacred to me, even though thou hast intended evil by me."

And never will I cause the reputation of thy wife to be dishonoured, by shedding thy blood or mine before her couch. If I must be killed, I do not complain if thou do it thyself; strike, then, O King, and thanks to thee for thy guest-present."

As the King bent down to raise his sword, there was a sound from below of clamour and war-cries, and Ingo hastened out. "Curse upon me, I have forgotten the danger of my comrades in my own. I hear the song of my swans; I come. And thou, King, beware; I shall find that which will compel thee." With stormy haste he burst out of the door, and the King whispered hoarsely, "Those who await him know not compassion;" and he hastened after him with brandished sword.

But Ingo sprang down only a few steps, to where he had left his sword, then down to the chamber of the young son, who slept with the Hero Balda, beneath the apartment of the Queen. He caught up the child from his bed, pressed him in his arms, and whispered to him, "Help me, Hermin! I am threatened with destruction; I will do thee no harm, if my comrades are not injured by the King."

The boy hung sleepily against his arm, and

clasped him round the neck. "I will willingly help thee, cousin," he said, unsuspectingly. Before the old warrior could rise from his bed, Ingo carried the boy to the Queen's door, where the King sprang towards him with his sword. But Bisino drew back dismayed, when he perceived his child under Ingo's knife. "Go forward, King Bisino," cried out Ingo, imperatively; "prepare the way for me; I hold what compels thee. The life of thy boy is surety for the heads of mine. Farewell, Frau Gisela; pray to the Gods that the King's house may not be shattered this night."

The men hastened down the stone steps. Frau Gisela listened motionless to the noise at the foot of the stairs. Did she wish that he should escape, who had pledged the life of her son? Whether he himself would return to her room in the tower, or the King, or neither of them, were the thoughts that stormed through her soul; she felt hatred against him who did not desire her help, and yet burning anguish about his life, and fear about the return of the King. She sprang to the window, and looked out into the darkness. She heard distant muttering and shrill cries, then all became still; she saw a glimmering light, but it also was extinguished; the night remained

dark and uncertain, like her own fate. Ingo stood on the last step before the door of the tower. "Drive away thy hounds, O King, that their bite may not touch thy son." The King stepped forward unwillingly, and waved away his watchers. Ingo sprang forward, past him, like a flying stag, to the apartment of his men. The King could not keep up with him, however much he hastened.

About the dwelling stood the bands of the King's boys, armed with shield and spear, many also with torches in their hands. On the ground in front of the steps blazed a red flame, throwing an uncertain light into the dark room, and on the wild faces of the Vandals. "Why do the screech-owls blink in the light, and turn their looks downwards?" cried out Berthar, from the steps. "I wonder that the King's boys are afraid of the base work; they are, as I hear, accustomed to kill by night. They are considered quite shameless among the people. Are they afraid that my sword should strike the brand of their torch-bearer? Approach nearer, ye good-for-nothing cowards, that ye may be cursed before all people as peace-breakers. Come on, that my boys may prepare you for your last journey."

"Coarse words are the coin of homeless

beggars," retorted Hadubald; "thou understandest well how to pay them, when, lingering about foreign banks, thou passest through the world. Ye are quite useless on man's earth, and henceforth ye will scarcely trouble foreign Courts by your noise."

Thus did the heroes by angry speeches prepare for the fight. Then sprang Ingo through the noisy bands, with the King's son in his arms; he rushed on to the steps, and stood among his faithful followers. A loud exclamation from the Vandals sounded about the hall. Ingo called out imperatively to the King's boys, "Retire, valiant heroes of Thuringia; the young King whom I hold bids you keep the peace. If you wish his head to remain uninjured, be careful not to annoy my men. Welcome is the King in the dwelling of his guests," he added, as Bisino came up, "and his presence signifies peace. Enter graciously, O King, the sleeping-room of thy guests; for it is not by weapons, I think, that we shall end the disturbance this day. Help me to conduct the King, Hermin, my cousin!" He put the boy down on the ground, and stepped, holding the knife over him, towards the King; the child seized the hand of his father, and stood between the Heroes. "Kindle the torches at the flame,"

cried Ingo to his people. "Let every one leave the room; ye Vandal heroes, watch on the steps while I take counsel with the King."

Morosely did Bisino sign to his retinue to clear the entrance; then he ordered Hadubald, with an equal number of King's men, to occupy the steps. Ingo conducted the King to the high gallery of the hall, where his bed stood, and sat down opposite to him, with his arm round the young King. Bisino seated himself hesitatingly, and looked gloomily before him. "Thou thinkest to compel me, by the life of my son, to spare thee and thy rovers. But wild anger has arisen between thee and me; and the reconciliation, I fear, would not be lasting. If thou withdraw to-day from mine anger, yet it will strike thee to-morrow, or some other time; for even if the petition of this boy open my cage to thee, yet know that my power reaches far, and that the King's will besets thee like a snared deer."

"I honour much thy power, O King," replied Ingo, "and I know that it will be difficult for me to ride over the bridge, and to trot over the heath, if thine anger pursue me in hostility. Yet I know that the King will act honourably, if he keep faith with me as far as his oath reaches. The King has invited me to single combat; praise-

worthy was the proffer, and worthy of a hero ; and if he cannot suffer me to remain upon man's earth, I know well that there can be no higher honour, in the opinion of men, than to fall by the King's weapon ; or if I should, instead, send him to the death-halls, to be killed with my followers by the fury of the Thuringians. Yet it is insufferable to me to fight against thee, my lord and Host ; for thou wast friendly towards me ; I have received kindness at thy Court ; I honour thy wife and thy boy whom I hold here in my arms ; and I have gladly hoped to save my life through thy kindness. So, although I consider any combat as honourable, it would wound me to engage in hostile strife with thee for my life."

"Thy words are sensible," replied the King, "and thy feeling is, as I suppose, upright, and unwillingly do I think of thy destruction ; but I am compelled by kingcraft, which no one understands except he who rules as father over his people. Know, then, that Cæsar demands that I shall deliver thee to his messenger."

"Will the great King of the people obey, like a conquered man, the command of a jealous Roman?"

"He has instigated the Kattens, who hasten to seize slaves and herds from my people ; on thy account the Thuringians sing the battle-song."

self, and listened again; from below there sounded a murmur of voices and a slight clash of weapons. Then she tore the taper from the high candlestick, and held it out of the window, so that the smoke and the glaring flame floated over the battlements of the tower, and the owls flew away frightened. A few minutes afterwards a single hunting-call answered from the distance; the Queen took the light back, and pushed the tapestry before the opening of the window.

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spoke secretly, and the boy sat between them, holding the knees of both with his hands.

The Vandals and the King's boys lay separated on the steps, behind their shields. Above them sat on stools the two sword-holders, Berthar and Hadubald, opposite one another. Then Hadubald began: "The converse in the hall of our sworn lords will, I think, produce peace. If it pleases thee, Hero, we will extinguish our wrath in a drink, which one of my comrades knows how to prepare quickly, for the night-air blows cold."

"Incendiary!" cried Berthar, grimly.

"Thou actest foolishly in blaming the servant, who has done what is profitable to his lord."

"Night murderer!" growled out Berthar again; "thou brokest thy faith for the sake of the King's beer; since then the drink has been spoilt which thou offerest."

"He who haughtily disdains to pledge at the beer-tap may take care that his blood is not tapped on the green heath."

"On the green heath and in the dark forest, as also here in our dwelling, thou art sure of bloody blows so soon as the King's peace does not defend thee; content thee with that, Hero!"

Long did the conference last between the

Kings; at length King Bisino called out, "Bring the glasses, cup-bearer, for a love-drink before the Hero Ingo departs." Willingly did the men move on the steps; the cup-bearer ran and brought a large cup of mead, and the Kings made a vow to one another over the cup and on the head of the boy. "And now we separate, Ingo," said the King. "I am sorry that thou art a travelling Hero, and not one of my race; and yet if thou wast of my kindred, I should perhaps have less confidence in thee."

"Think of me kindly, O my lord," said Ingo, gratefully; and he joyfully called to the old man, "Prepare for decamping; we depart."

"We came by the light of the sun," replied Berthar, "and my lord and his heroes will not run away like night thieves. If the Chieftain chooses that we should break up before the cock crows, I pray of thee, King Bisino, that thy boys may light us with the torches, which they brought so carefully this evening round this house, that we might not at our departure be without a bright light."

The King at first looked angrily at the bold man, but he said, "I praise thee; thou understandest how to fight for thy master with blows and with words. Mount your horses, ye proud

guests, and ye men, light the brands, for the King himself will be their escort to the gate."

On the bridge Ingo parted from the King and his son, and all were astonished when the King, after the farewell, returned once more over the planks, hastened to Ingo, and embraced and kissed him. Berthar looked smilingly at the gloomy countenances of the King's boys, who were lighting them. "Ride at a foot's pace," was his command outside the gate to the Vandals, "that they may not imagine that we fear their greeting on our backs." After a time he called out, "Take the lead, Wolf, and let the horses gallop; the night-air blows fresh, and well has the journey to the King's Castle prospered with us!"

When the gates closed behind the guests, the King thus commanded his boys: "Whoever, to-morrow or later, prattles about this night, or whoever whispers in drinking with the Romans, as I have heard many to-day, the King's axe shall cut short the words of the fool."

Then he took the sleepy child in his arms, and carried it to his own room. As he passed by the tower, he looked gloomily at the chamber of the Queen. There sat a disconsolate woman, with her head leaning against the casement of the window, listening to the sound of voices, and

to the horses' hoofs which were heard in the distance. But the King thought, "If she were not of such illustrious race it would be better for me and her; for I would willingly give her blows, and then caress her; but she has severed the bond of union between herself and me, and she has striven against my sword: does she think that I shall forget that? As far as concerns the Roman, I am heartily pleased that he does not get his own way; for it was an unworthy demand, and he was an imperious messenger. Now I will offer the silver instead of the gold that he requires. On the following morning the King summoned the astonished Harietto, and said to him: "For great Cæsar's sake, I have done and carried out what the honour of a King has permitted me, and nothing more; I have recalled the right of guest from the banished man, and left him without escort wherewith to leave my country, and he trots now far from home." When the King went again to his treasure-house, and observed his face in the dishes, he said to himself, sighing: "One anxiety has passed away, but another greater has come: only one thing I like; it is an honest face that I look at."

IX.

AT IDISBURG.

WHEN the sap was swelling in the branches of the trees, and the young foliage was bursting forth from the buds, the young men of the forest villages were seized with a desire to travel. There was a secret humming in the houses, and brisk fellows were holding quiet counsel in the concealment of the forest thicket; for the expedition had not been ordered by the old and wise of the district, and the holy sacrifice of the country was not to consecrate it; it was only the discontented who were separating themselves from their loved home, wilfully and at their own risk, because they had a mind for a better share of land. In the beginning only a few had decided to seek their fortunes in a foreign country—among them Baldhard and Bruno, the sons of Bero: but soon others were seized with the same longing—younger sons of respectable families,

who disliked their neighbours. Many a one was secretly reminded by the maiden whom he loved, that he had wooed her before the projected journey; and where a father had many daughters he ventured his child on this distant hope. This was not an expedition to an unknown distance, to which the moon and the stars, the blowing wind, or the flying raven led; for the place of their new abode lay only a few days' journey from the district border, and the road was through the forests and marshes through which former families of their fellow-countrymen had gone. Therefore the travellers cared little for the dangers of the road, and not much about nourishment and fodder for the cattle. Then also, where they wished to settle they could hope for a kindly greeting; for a prudent friend had carefully arranged beforehand about their journey, and had concluded a compact with the people to whom they went. These willing wanderers prepared for their departure more secretly than was usually the custom; for all the Chiefs of the district were not pleased at the journey, by which the number of their young warriors was diminished; amongst these was Prince Answald, and the family of Sintram, who sought to prevent the outpour, as far as their power reached. The

travellers had also to fear the jealousy of the King, for he might disturb their settlement before they were firmly rooted on the new ground. Therefore they had associated themselves together in secret counsel at night, and had chosen the sons of Bero for their leaders; during the last month they had prepared for the expedition, had obtained contributions among their friends, provided themselves with waggons and agricultural tools, and, as far as they could, bargained for cattle. They wished to break up singly, and with little stir, and to collect together on the other side of the district boundary in orderly company.

In the early morning the waggons stood packed with corn and house utensils; a cover of leather was spread over the firm joists of wood; the yoked oxen bellowed, the women and children drove the herds behind the waggons, and large dogs, the trusty companions of the travellers, barked round them; their fellow-kinsmen and neighbours brought them, at their departure, what would serve as food for their journey, or a keepsake from home. The departure was not altogether joyful; even the most courageous man was secretly anxious about the future. Though the new country was no great distance, it was

unknown to almost all, and it was uncertain whether the Gods of their home would there grant them protection, or whether noxious reptiles and polecats would destroy the cattle or the seed, or whether hostile men might burn their houses. The children also felt frightened; they sat quiet on the sacks, and the little ones wept, although the parents had encircled their heads and necks with healing herbs which are dear to the Gods. The travellers rose with the rising sun; the elders of their family or some wise mother spoke a blessing on their journey, and all murmured a prayer for good fortune, and exorcised away dangerous beasts of the forest, and roving robbers. But the other village people who remained at home looked upon the wanderers as lost men: the offenders who gave up the blessings of home, appeared to them as if possessed by an evil spirit. Although the country people were powerfully attracted to distant parts, yet they always feared a life far from their holy places, and from the customs and laws of their home.

The waggons moved rumbling up the hills; from the heights the wanderers looked back once more upon the village of their fathers, and bowed themselves with a greeting to the invisible powers of the plain; many a discontented fellow sent a

curse back upon their enemies, who had made their home-hearth insupportable. Then they all took their way through the mountain forest. Toilsome was the journey, over stony roads in which the snow-waters had made deep furrows; the men had often to dismount from their horses, and with mattocks and spades to make the path more practicable; the wild cries and cracking of the whips of the drivers resounded; the boys sprang behind the waggons, and with stones prevented them from running back; often the draught-cattle tugged in vain, till one team helped the other, or men and women put their strong shoulders to the wheels. When the road was more practicable, then the men rode, watching the caravan with raised weapons, ready to fight against wild beasts or lawless forest rovers. But when the wanderers after the first day's journey, reached the lonely forest valley which was appointed for their meeting-place, then all the toil of the day was forgotten in the joy of seeing before them in the wilderness their fellow-countrymen; shrilly did the newcomers shout from the heights, and those who were encamped answered with a like call; those who had formerly been little acquainted greeted one another as brothers. The men collected in a body, and Baldhard, who was expert in measuring, marked

out the place for the encampment with staves. Then the draught-cattle were unharnessed, the waggon were pushed together like a rampart, and in the circle the night-fire was kindled on stones which had been brought together. Whilst the domestic animals were feeding, guarded by armed youths and dogs, the women were preparing the evening repast; but the men made night-pens for the sheep of the copsewood, they divided the watches, and fetched from the waggon the strong drink that they had brought with them; then they lay down, and spoke quietly of the good meadow-land that they hoped to find on the Idisbach, and in the endless forest at the south of the mountains; how stony the cultivated ground was, how steep the country, and therefore how thinly this mountain land must be inhabited. When the meal was ended, the most valuable of the horses and cattle were assembled within the circle of the waggon, and the sleepy children concealed under the leather coverings. After them the women ascended into the narrow space; only the men sat for a time sociably with their drinking-horns, till their eyes became heavy, and the cold night-air stopped their jollity. Then they wrapped themselves in skins and coverlets, and laid themselves down by the fire and under the waggon. It

became more still; only the wind blew from the mountains, and the watchers, pacing round the circle of waggons and the pen, occasionally threw logs of wood on the blazing fire. But the dogs barked incessantly, and in the distance there was the sound of violent howling, and around the fire-circle trotted greedy beasts of prey, like shadows in the rising mist.

In this way the wanderers travelled slowly for three days through the mountain forest; the rain poured down on them, and the wind dried their wet clothes. Sometimes they stopped in the valleys at the houses of their countrymen; there they met either wild fellows who had been hardened by their forest life, or poor settlers who complained of the rough arable land, and thus made the hearts of the travellers heavy. On the fourth morning they passed by the wooden scaffolding of a tower which was built on the country boundary of Thuringia; the watchman, who dwelt in a house near to it, and formerly had little occasion to be anxious about travelling bands, looked with astonishment on the travellers; but these greeted him loudly, for although he was only a lonely forest man, he was the last of their people. Then they were an hour in passing through the border wilderness,—barren

gravel heights, and gnarled pines, where no settler had ever built a house, and the sound of an axe had seldom been heard; for it was a weird tract, and it was said that mischievous spirits floated along the boundary, because they were excluded from the ground which the good Gods of the people guarded for the men who dwelt there. But on the other side of the pine wood, the settlers looked from the height joyfully upon a wide valley, which was enclosed by high hills and thick woods. Along this flowed the Idisbach in a winding course through the meadows, and at the foot of the heights were houses and divisions of arable land. The sun shone gaily over the bright green and sprouting foliage, the horses snuffed as they scented the fresh air of the valley, and the oxen bellowed in view of the meadow; but the wanderers raised their arms in prayer to the Goddess who ruled over the valley, and could well protect the life of these men, if they were dear to her.

A horseman sprang to meet the wanderers, and even from a distance whirled his spear in greeting through the air. The settlers shouted to him, for they recognized in him their countryman Wolf; the women also thronged about his horse, and the children stretched out their little hands

from the waggon. "Welcome to you, dear countrymen!" exclaimed Wolf, "the journey is accomplished. Encamp near the houses; for on yonder hill the wise men of the district are waiting at the sacrificial stone to make a firm alliance with you, that you may lawfully become part of the people, and gain your lot of land." Then they were all excited with new zeal, and followed the turf path to the valley.

Then Baldhard began confidentially to Wolf, who was riding near him. "You raced in the night and fog, past our houses, from the King's Castle at Thuringia, like supernatural figures of darkness. Then there was scarcely time to press thy hand, and to speak of the days of our journey. Since then, we have neither seen nor heard anything of you; I have felt great anxiety about your fate, yet I was obliged to conceal my doubts from the others."

Wolf laughed. "The Vandals understand the art of making themselves invisible; and I think that, above all others, the Hero Berthar is of the race of the forest fitchet, for he sped through the wild fern, as much at home as we of the village, although he rode through as a stranger. Even their horses lay themselves down in the forest cover, like lurking dogs. We

galloped unseen over the boundary, and penetrated into this country. Here we met with a good reception; thy father had prepared everything carefully for us. My lord Ingo governs here as Chieftain; and the peasants of Marvingia are, I observe, pleased with him. But the people here thou wilt consider as old-fashioned and respectable. They still drink their beer out of thick bowls of oak-wood, which truly are heavy to raise; yet the drink is excellent. But since we have been here, we have had little leisure: part of us work with hammer and axe on the hills, and others followed the Prince to the south, over the Main, to the Burgundians. To-day you come at a good hour; for the Chieftain, to whom you wish to pay fealty, has just now returned. Prince Ingo expects you at the people's sacrifice."

"If thou seest the Hero Berthar," replied Baldhard, "give him this, from Frida, my sister; she earnestly desired it to be wound for him in the Prince's house." And he laid a ball of string in his hand.

From the encampment the Thuringians rode up to a mountain which raised its round head above the other heights. Before the last ascent Ingo was awaiting them, with his followers on horse-

back. The Vandals sprang down when the settlers approached, and called out a joyful greeting to them. The Thuringians, also, were inspirited, when they saw before them the Hero to whom they had once given hospitality at their home, and who might be to them a good leader in danger, and a just judge. Ingo led the band up the hill to the sacrificial stone, where the men of the valley stood thickly packed, and in front of them, Marvalk, a grey-headed man, their sacrificing Priest. They divided themselves into three bands round the stone; on which three times three oxen were offered to the good Gods—three for each nation. Over the sacrificial kettle the men bound themselves by a covenant, and vowed to honour the Hero Ingo as Chieftain. After that the sacrificial feast was prepared under the shade of the trees, and it appeared to all as a good gift, when the Chieftain rose and announced to his people that the old quarrel with the Burgundians about the boundary was settled.

From the sacrificial feast Ingo rode with Berthar along the valley to another height, on which the Vandals had entrenched their home. On the way, he said, joyfully, "We have come to terms with two Kings, and we may prosper here,

if the Gods remain gracious to us. I have to thank thy warlike expedition with the Burgundians for my success with King Gundomar; he now resents the arrogance of the Romans, and will, I hope, keep the peace for some time."

"Meanwhile let us plant ourselves here firmly among the rocks," said Berthar, laughing, "and in a few years it will be difficult for even a great King to break into our new seat. Look there, my King, at the strength of thine own house."

From a woody hill-side towered up a steep rocky hill, like a mountain nose, over the valley of Idisburg, separated from the heights behind by a chasm. The hill rose proudly out of the green valley; on its summit were old oak trees, its only foliage. For on the side of the hill the trees had been felled, and about half-way up the stems had been piled in layers, with the stones from the rock, and earth, forming a thick barricade; a trench was thrown up before it, so far removed from the summit that no spears could reach the height. Cleverly had the old man made use of the channel of the water and the little ravines, in order to make a secure path from the summit to the surrounding rampart, so that, on the day of battle, the besieged might hasten up and down without the enemy

being able to hit them from below ; but he had so scarp'd the entrenched declivity that stones and spears could find a free path downwards from the commanding height. Then, where the protecting hill joined the slope, the trench was deeper and the rampart higher. On this side a strong spring flowed from under a projecting rock within the outer rampart, not very far from the summit of the hill. There the workmen had preserved the trees, in order that the entrance to the spring might be shady and secure. But the summit of the hill was levelled, and along its edge a second rampart was formed with layers of stones and stems. It surrounded the oaks, and a space which was large enough to enclose the herds and wives and children of the settlers in time of danger. Where the steep riding-path led from the valley through the surrounding ramparts to the fortress, it was barred by a gate, and there was a wooden tower for the watchman at the entrance. On the summit of the hill, in the midst of the trees, Ingo's men had constructed a King's hall of large beams ; near it stakes put into the ground denoted the places where the dwellings of the men, the stalls for the horses and cattle, and the room for the stores were to be built. But in order that the King might not be

without a room during the time of building, a wooden house was erected for him on the top of the highest oak-tree. Betwixt the strong branches the boys had arranged level rafters, and had nailed over them planks, and had cut off the inner oak branches, or drawn them outward and so covered the free space in the foliage with boards, that two stories stood over one another at the top. Small steps ran up the stem, and both the rooms were closed below by a trap-door.

With great pleasure did Ingo look on the work that had been done. With still greater pleasure did the old architect lead him from place to place. "Free as the birds did we come into this land," he said, laughing, "and among the birds my King shall dwell, till a hearth-seat and hall shall be prepared for him. And look—under there, by the brook of the Weird Sister, the Thuringian boys are arranging already a waggon bulwark, in the place where they are to build their village. I have placed with them thy chamberlain Wolf, for he is versed in the customs of their country. Look farther down in the valley,—there is a delightful land for the ox herds; and out of the forest behind, the deer stalks and the wild ox bellows. But in the distance, towards the south, where the Idisbach runs into the Main, thou

beholdest the grey forest of the Burgundians and the hills on which they have disposed their border fortresses."

"The habitation is constructed," answered Ingo, giving his hand to the trusty man, "but the forest singer, whom I wish to conceal in it, sits lamenting on the other side of the mountain. The greatest deed is still to be done. Joyless do I roam about, and sorrow for the fate of another oppresses my heart."

"For that, take my message. This was sent by Bero's daughter from the Prince's house," answered Berthar, drawing out a string with a row of hazel nuts. "Observe, my King; the maiden has ingeniously marked for thee the space of time. The first fruit, half-white and half-black, means the time of equal days and nights, each other a following day; on each seventh the picture of the changing moon is cut; the last nut is black, and there is a needle stuck in it; this signifies, as I understand it, the day which is fixed for the marriage. Now count, my lord. Short is the time which remains to thee; the moon has changed for the last time."

Then Ingo exclaimed, "Choose for me, father, the blood-comrades for a desperate deed, and equip, according to the custom of our home, the

men and horses for the Vandal to ride into the black night. But do thou pray with us to the night-spirits for storm and darkness."

The black clouds drove over the forest bower; the shadows spread themselves, and glided again together; now there passed over the moon something like a man's hand, now like the gold glimmering foot of a horse. Thick mist rolled down from the tops of the mountain, and enveloped the heights in a leaden grey, floated into the valleys, and veiled in dusky twilight whatever was prominent on the earth,—rock, and foliage, and moving men. The wind howled over the mountains, long echoing wailings, and shook the tops of the trees, so that their branches bent low into the valley; here and there a dull sound was heard in the forest, as of a heavy fall; old primæval stems, hollowed by mouldering decay, broke asunder; tree was hurled upon tree, and tore those which cracked under the heavy burden deep down into the narrow valley. The scared ravens flew screaming asunder, and whirled downwards into the clefts, where they firmly clung with beaks and claws. Below, the foaming flood of the stream roared angrily; it surged against the barrier of trees, and rose from rock to rock; branches and stems spun round in it,

whirling madly, and the torrent of waters dashed itself against the mountains.

A pale light spread itself over the forest hills; perhaps it came from the earth, perhaps from the clouds in the heavens; indistinctly did one see the mountains towering over the dark light of the valley. Suddenly there was a flash of lightning, and wilder than the roar of the forest and the cracking of trees sounded the lordly call of the thunder-God.

Ingo was standing high above the torrent; he held himself fast with his hand to a root, which projected sideways from the ground, and reverently he bent his head to the flash and thunder-clap. "Among the night-Gods whom I conjured to my aid," he murmured, "dost thou also approach, powerful Ruler? What does heaven's flame in which thou travellest announce to the suppliant man? Dost thou warn me away from man's earth to the halls of light, and shall I be shattered like the forest heads in the storm? Or wilt thou grant me that, like the fruit which falls from thy trees, I shall abide firmly in the valleys where men dwell? If thou hast a token for me, let me perceive whether the deed which I dare will prosper to me." Then fell a flash of lightning from the clouds on to the rock beneath him, and

from the rock a blue light flamed, meeting the lightning; the thunder crashed, the rock-head separated itself, and leapt down from the heights into the valley; ever wilder in its leaps and quicker in its springs, it broke through the forest, and splitting, dashed into the torrent, scattering the foam high up to the heavens. But the crack and the flash were followed by a stillness, and in the distance was heard the night-cry of men's voices. Then Ingo exclaimed with wild joy, "I hear the wedding boys inviting me to carry off the bride: bless our work, great Ruler!" and swinging his weapon, he sprang through the thunder-clouds and dark night into the valley.

The moon had disappeared behind the mountains; black night covered the forest arbour; the storm-giants coursed crashing round the houses of the Prince's Manor; they struck the iron eaves of the roofs from the planks on the top of the hall, and pushed roaring against the closed doors. Any of the men who were awake amid the raging of the night-powers, hid their heads timidly on their pillows; even the dogs in the courtyard lay whining among the huts and under the stairs. In the chamber of the noble maiden, the light of the lamp flickered in the sharp draught of air, which forced its way through doors and walls.

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Irmgard was sitting on her bed; Frida knelt before her on the ground, holding her play-fellow clasped in her arms, and listening anxiously to the howling of the night-spirits.

"The wind's bride flies over the houses," said Irmgard, piteously, "chased by the giant; they say any one who ventured to throw his knife into the whirl would wound the flying woman. My father has threatened me also with the knife, because I prayed him on my knees to release me to-morrow from the vow to the bad man. Thither I will flee, like the giant's bride, before I say the holy words to the hated one."

"Do not speak so fearfully," implored Frida, "lest the superhuman powers without should hear it, and remind thee of thy speech;" and again she raised her head and listened.

"Not long did the happiness last, which the Gods sent me when he entered the house," began Irmgard again. "Then I was without care; when the night-songsters sang kindly to me, and the blackberries hung on the bushes. I proudly thought, when he spoke to me, I should float in feather attire over man's earth. Now I stop alone in the darkness. I must hate myself," she continued, "for lamenting over my own danger. Ingo, loved one, bitter is the anxiety which I

feel about myself, but greater the sorrow about thy fate, for thou hast vanished in the night-wind; no one brings me news of thee, and I know not whether thou thinkest of me, or hast forgotten me. Dost thou still breathe in the foreign land, oppressed, like me? or shall I put the purple under the earth-clod for thee?" She sprang up, and exclaimed, "On my heart I concealed thy secret; I am bound to thy life, and must live till I know where the head of my King rests. See whether the morning approaches for which I tremble," she cried out to her companion.

Frida sprang to the window-opening, and pushed back a corner of the curtain; a shrill blast of wind broke in, and the water of the heavens dashed into the room, and struck a cold blow on the cheeks of the women.

"I see no grey dawn in the heaven, and hear no sound but the groaning in the air," replied Frida, and closed the opening again with shutters and the curtain.

"Thanks to thee!" said Irmgard, "there is yet a little time to be joyful. But when the morning comes, then the wedding-guests will collect; they will approach in festive dress, and the circle will be closed; they will draw the woman in, they will

speak the words before her, and mock her by the question, whether she will vow. 'No!' she cries out. Then I see frightened faces, and one red with anger. He grasps the knife. 'Strike me!'" Then, concealing her face in her hands, she moaned out, "Poor father! thou also wilt be sorrowful to lose thy child. For I go up thither upon a lonely path, I glide over empty heaths, I wade through ice streams; still is the way and cold is the night to the door of the Goddess of death, and around me move dark shadows silently."

The door of the house groaned heavily, and sprang open; a shadowy figure pressed in,—a second, a whole troop,—gigantic figures with black heads and black dresses. The women were terror-struck at the night-outrage. But out of the circle of silent gliding monsters, one sprang forward. Only one sound, whether a cry or a sigh, came from Irmgard's lips; a dark cap fell over her head; she was seized with giant strength, and carried out into the stormy night. Behind her another of the night-comrades threw a covering over Frida's head, and wished to raise her. But she struggled violently, and although she shuddered, yet she cried out, "Freely will I go on my own feet, even among night apparitions; behind the bear-skin cap I observe one with red

locks, whom I know." The next moment the room was empty, the outward door closed, and the night-comrades sprang into the free air through a great gap which they had broken in the wall of the court. The wild horses snorted under the storm and rain, and carried the horse-men into it. Again the spirits of the storm screamed shrill cries of revenge, and hurled the water of the clouds against the roof of the house from which the Prince's child had vanished.

Towards the close of the following day, the storm had ceased, and the sun coloured with rosy evening light the oaks of Idisburg. Then out of the dark forest which projected behind the circle of wood, sprang a band of horsemen up to the fortress. Berthar, who himself kept watch in the tower, hastened to the gate, and raising his arms, called a greeting of welcome to the new comers. The horses entered into the court, and two veiled women were lifted down. Ingo loosened the hood of the first, and Irmgard's pale face was lighted up by the sun. The Vandals threw themselves on their knees before her, seized her hand and the hem of her garment, and hailed their Queen with cries of jubilee. But Berthar approached the motionless one respectfully, took her hand, and said, "Close the ring, blood-comrades, and pray that the high

Gods may bless the alliance of the King and Queen." First he put the holy wedding question to Ingo, Ingbert's son, the King of the Vandals. Then the old man, who stood in the place of father, turned to the noble maiden, and put the same question. For the first time since that fearful night her lips opened, and the trembling words sounded—"Yes, I will;" then the Vandal wife concealed her face on the breast of the man who was dear to her. The bridal feast was prepared under the oak trees; the boys brought the wooden tables, and placed them on the cross-beams which they had arranged; they had also carefully made raised arm-chairs as a seat of honour for the Host and Hostess. "Let the wild meal of thy boys, noble Princess, please thee to-day as a welcome," begged the old man. "We offer thee wooden dishes instead of silver, and a drink from the spring, and the mead brewed by the peasants, and the flesh of a boar from their own forest. Be gracious and favourable to thy people."

In the evening Berthar, standing in front of the oaks, said to Ingo, "During my long life, I have often been happy in my mind, when I was only a roving hero; but far happier than before am I to-day with my Prince. For the nest which we

have built here, like hawks, upon the rock, appears good work for thee and for another; and when elevated with mead, I will glory in the work, the good stone-work, the deep trenches, and the working hands of the men. I have practised many kinds of man's work, and I have more often destroyed than built; but I consider that the best work, next to a spring in battle, is the axe which creates a home on ground which has no master. Rest, my King, on thy bridal couch: for the first time since thou wast a boy, thou sleepest as Master of thine own soil, and layest thine arm round the neck of a wife. Rest without care, for thy boys will respectfully watch in a circle round the green bridal chamber of their lord. Blest was the day; blest be the night; and may the entrance into the house be a presage of welfare for your lives!"

X.

AT THE SPRING.

ONCE had the summer covered the oaks at Idisburg in their green attire, and once had the winter swept the branches bare; but bright blazed through the whole year the hearth-fire of the new house under the trees. Now it was again summer, and a prosperous time; the little light clouds passed over the sky in long rows, and at the foot of the verdant hills the sheep and cattle passed also slowly in long rows. Amongst the oaks there rose now a strong wooden building,—the Prince's hall. He who ascended the steps, entering through the door into the wide hall, saw at the far end the holy hearth, over him the strong raftered roof, on the side the raised gallery, and behind, the entrance to the chambers of the lord and lady of the house. In the courtyard in front of it stood the low sleeping houses of the men under a projecting bulwark, also the stalls and store-rooms.

Under the oak-tree which bore the arbour house sat Irmgard, looking happily down before her, for on the ground lay her little son in the linden shield of his father, and Frida was rocking him. The little one was putting out his hands to catch a bee which was buzzing about him. "Get away with you, honey-bearer," said Irmgard, frightened, "and do the little hero no harm; he does not yet know that thou concealest a weapon under thy coat. Fly to thy playmates, and be industrious in preparing the sweet honeycomb, in order that my hero may have pleasure in thy work in the winter. For he is the young lord of the Castle, and we keep for him the tenth of everything good that is produced in the wild forests. Look, Frida, how he clenches his fist, and how wildly he looks before him; he will some time be a warrior whom men will fear. There! his father brings him also his hunting spoil," she exclaimed joyfully, raising the little one out of the shield, and holding him up on high, as Ingo approached, with his curved horn and hunting spear, and a slain roebuck on his shoulder. The Chieftain bent over his son, and stroked the curly hair of his wife as he greeted her; then he laid the game down against the tree. "This speedy foot crossed my path as I walked over

the mountain across the Burgundian boundary; it is near enough, and one can reach it without much galloping," he added, laughing. "One of the Marvingians had robbed us of two cattle out of the forest enclosure; we followed the track, which led us over the boundary, and our messengers go south to demand the booty. Yet I fear it is in vain; for the border people over there are ill-disposed, and we may not be able to obtain our property, except by going on their ground and falling on their herds. Bad hero-work is such night-wandering, like a cat that goes out mousing; yet the injured peasants demand it, and the Chieftain dare not refuse."

"Therefore thy country cousins greet thee, smiling, and thy wife also rejoices in the honour that they show her," said Irmgard, consolingly.

"I have a good wife, who is glad for my sake," replied Ingo; "yet I fear that she seldom hears a minstrel extolling the deeds of her husband. Last night I dreamt that the weapons over our bed clattered, and when I rose up I saw that my sword danced in its sheath. Dost thou know what the dream portends, thou soothsayer?"

"That my King longs for an expedition," replied Irmgard, earnestly, "away from the mother and child. Thy dwelling is narrow, and

thy abode concealed in the forest. Well do I see sometimes the clouds on thy brow, and hear battle-words from the lips of the sleeper, when I bend over thee."

"That is after the manner of men, as thou knowest," replied Ingo—"at home, when on the bed, to long for a fighting expedition, and after the fight, for the return home to the arms of one's wife. It is very possible that the song of my sword predicts a combat with the Burgundians, for their dealings are very vexatious, and Gundemar's feeling cools towards us. Look there—the old man also is turned into a workman." He pointed to Berthar, who was crossing the court with an axe and a large leathern pocket.

"There is an injury to be repaired in the drawbridge," explained the hero, as he approached them with a greeting, "and hands are few. Thy boys, O King, are joyfully preparing, with the country-folk, piles of wood for the mountain fires for the midsummer night-feast."

"But thou watchest for us all," said Irmgard.

"Caution becomes the watcher who guards a treasure," replied Berthar, bowing to Irmgard; "and," he continued significantly, "the gable roof of this hall projects towards the north, and a bad storm is collecting in the mountains. I

often look northwards, even on a warm sunny day like this. Forgive me, Princess, if I awaken secret cares. So long as my old companion Isanbart breathed, he with kind feeling restrained the thoughts of revenge on the other side of the mountain; for Herr Answald paid attention to his words. But since they have raised the mound over him, thy enemies alone have the ear of the Chieftain. 'Tis not the clamour of the people that I fear now, but a secret expedition for revenge over the forest. Unwillingly do I see the Princess wandering alone in the valley."

"Must I live as a prisoner, father?" asked Irmgard, sorrowfully.

"Only for the present time be pleased to submit to our care. Many wounds heal, and that of Theodulf is healed; and he rides, they say, now this way to the court of the King."

There was a sound of loud talk from the bulwark; the watchman on the wooden stage blew his horn, and a gay tone was joined to the call which did not belong to it. Irmgard laughed. "It is a friend," said Ingo; "the watchman wishes to do him honour."

"Volkmar!" cried out Irmgard, and advanced to meet the minstrel, who entered the court in great haste. But she stopped when she beheld

the solemn face of the wanderer. "Thou comest from home, yet I perceive that thou dost not bring a friendly greeting."

"I come from the King's Castle," began Volkmar, his countenance stirred with emotion, as he bent himself before the Princess and the Chieftain; my rest was only short in the forest arbour. Herr Answald was preparing to ride to the King's Castle, and the Princess was sitting among her maidens; all was still in the house; no one asked whither I was going." Irmgard turned her face away, but in the next moment she clasped the hand of her husband, and looked up to him lovingly.

"Thou comest as a messenger of the King," began Ingo; "I trust he gave thee a kind mission."

"The lips of the King are mute," replied Volkmar; "his anxieties for his throne and treasure are ended: he was found dead on his bed, after an evening of merry carousal among his men. The wood-pile was erected for him, and the fire flamed about his dead body." A deep silence followed his words.

"He was a powerful ruler, and a courageous warrior; I could have wished him a better end than among his drunken body-guard," began

Ingo, deeply affected. "However he may have acted towards others, from peevish suspicion, he helped to my happiness, and for a whole year he has restrained the pressure of my enemies."

"The Queen now keeps the keys of the treasure-room for her son," continued the minstrel; "she rules powerfully in the King's Castle, and sends her men into the country. The nobles vie with each other to gain favour at her court; hardly any one ventures to defy her authority. Many already think that the fist of the dead King was less oppressive than the white finger of Frau Gisela. This I announce to thee, Prince, sent by no one; do thou consider whether it signifies evil to thee."

"Thou tellest what is sorrowful and joyful with the same seriousness," answered Ingo, smiling. "If the King did me no injury, I know the Queen to be kind and noble-minded. Now for the first time I can boast of my happiness with a light spirit, so far as depends on the will of the neighbours."

"Uncertain is the favour of a ruling woman," said the minstrel.

"I was a faithful boundary-guardian to the departed King: why should I be less so to his son? and so long as Frau Gisela commands in

Thuringia, I expect good from thence. Thou didst speak to the Queen?"

"Hostile were the looks the Queen directed to me, when she saw me in the crowd. 'If thou ever thinkest again to play thy dances to the maidens at my court,' she called out to me, 'avoid the forest road. When the magpie flies over the forest, the hawk plucks its feathers. Thou wast a very prattling messenger once; be careful with thy tongue.' She then signed to me to depart, and I hastened flying through the forest here, impelled by anxiety about thee and the Princess."

"Even though thy anxiety may be unnecessary, yet I thank thee for thy faithfulness. Some calumniator has made the Queen hostile to thee. How she is disposed towards me I have experienced in hours of difficulty: assured is our friendship; and our blood flows from the same source. For the high ancestors of both rule in the Hall of the Gods as two children of one family: we live amongst strangers on both sides of the mountain—I the man, and she the woman."

"But not thy wife, my lord," interposed Berthar.

Ingo laughed. "Nevertheless she is a woman, and it would ill befit us men to fear the caprices of a woman."

"Still worse to trust their friendship," said the old man, warningly. "When the she-bear was little, she licked the hand of the man whom she afterwards seized by the neck."

"Thou art much too stubborn in thy distrust," said Ingo, in a tone of kind reproof; "but I will exercise the prudence which thou advisest. We will ride ourselves into the villages, and invite the old men to counsel, whether we shall send a message to the new Queen, and use foresight in preparations. If the work should prove useless, we will afterwards laugh at our anxieties. Do thou, Volkmar, remain as guest with us till thou knowest that Frau Gisela is again gracious to thee; thou knowest well what a pleasure to us is thy presence."

"Forgive me, my lord," answered the minstrel, seriously, "if I do not stop my journey; quicker than the spring of the deer or the flight of the falcon is the anger of this woman. She has quite forgotten that she praised me, as bearer of news, before the dead King. If thou thinkest to be safe from her, for me there is no hope."

"Who can stop the foot of the wander-loving minstrel? If thou must depart, yet be pleased to rest thee awhile by the hearth of the Princess, and return again soon to our oaks."

"I shall seek again the spot where the oaks stand," replied the minstrel, bending over the offered hand of the Chieftain.

Ingo went with Berthar to the horses. Irmgard looked after him. "Thou knowest many secrets, Volkmar," she said, in a low tone, "but thou canst not interpret to the anxious wife all the thoughts which pass through the head of her husband."

"Thoughts whirl in the head as swallows round the roof of the house—they fly in and out," said the minstrel, consolingly; "but thou art like the hearth-fire in the house, which gives peace and gladness; do not let thyself be anxious about flitting shadows. But I approach thee, also, Princess, as a secret messenger. As I was departing from the forest arbour, Frau Gundrun went with me to the enclosure where she keeps her poultry. She pointed to a female stork, and said, 'The bird flew away from the courtyard in the summer, but before the winter it came back, bringing its young one with it; now we feed them both. One whom thou knowest disappeared from here, because she laid hold of the flag-feather of a wandering swan; take her now another token for a journey.'" The minstrel presented to her the token—the wing-feather of a stork and the quill-feather of a young bird,

joined together by a thread. Irmgard held in her hand her mother's greeting, and her tears fell upon it. "Frau Adebar, the female stork, flew back to the courtyard, because a bird-of-prey had clawed in pieces the Host of her nest. But my heart bids me withstand the wild falcon, which spreads its wings against my lord. Come, Volkmar, that I may show thee my poor stork-child, which clenches its little hands, crowing, when his father bends his face over it."

In the afternoon all was quiet at the circular fortress. The minstrel had departed; Ingo hastened through the valley with his house-comrades, and Frau Irmgard stood by the spring which trickled out from under the rock, not far from the house. There the men had chiselled out for the Princess a beautiful stone trough, in which the water was collected. The sun shone warm, the cool water plashed merrily, and flowed from the stone trough down the valley; over the wall of rock hung from above the branches of an ash tree as a protecting roof, and round the spring stood willows, concealing the place from the eyes of strangers by their grey foliage.

Irmgard held her little son over the holy spring. "Dear Queen of the running water!" she prayed, "be gracious to my child, that his limbs

may become strong, and his body well formed, like that of my lord." She bathed the boy, who cried impatiently, and kicked his legs about; she rubbed his little body with a linen cloth, wrapped him up warmly, laid him on the moss, and spoke to him caressingly, till his cries ended, and he again smiled on his mother. Then she rose, and took off her upper dress, so that she stood, without her girdle, in her under dress; she rinsed the border of her wet dress in the water, and spread it out where the rays of the sun fell on the turf. "Once I had maid-servants, who tucked up their dresses for my service, and seldom did my hands touch either hearth or trough; now I dwell with Frida and the serving-maid alone in the wilderness, and my hands have become rough; I fear that this will vex my lord. If my hands were soft, as they once were, he would lose many comforts. How could he live without my help on the wild march?" She looked at her image, which moved hither and thither in the rippling water, and loosened the bands of her hair. The long curly locks fell down, dipping their ends in the water, but she fixed her eyes on the ripples, and said in a low voice, "It was thus I pleased him once; I should like to know whether he still thinks of me as when he kissed me in the morn-

ing light? Or has my secret grief at the anger of my father and the sorrow of my mother changed me? I conceal my sighs from the King, and clasp my hands only in solitude. But this solitary repose vexes his proud spirit, and he longs to go forth to glorious hero-work; for exalted is his mind, and he has all his life long been accustomed to prepare the battle-field for the eagles. Now he hides his head under the wooden roof for my sake."

She bowed her head down over the stone edge with heavy thoughts. The tower watchman called out, and there was a sound of footsteps on the rock, without her giving attention to it; then a horse snorted near her, and a deep woman's voice exclaimed, "Why does the woman cower down by the edge of the spring? is she so desirous to behold her own face, that her eyes and ears are closed?"

Irmgard started up; before her, high upon her horse, sat a powerful woman; a veil hung down from her yellow hair; over her shoulders fell a purple mantle, covering the back of the horse, the equipments of which glittered with gold; its hoofs stamped on the linen dress that Irmgard had spread out. Behind the stranger she saw the pale face of Sintram. The blood

mounted into her face; she knew who the stranger was, before whom she stood without a girdle, with bare legs. But her eyes flamed with anger, as also those of the Queen. Thus did the women silently examine each other with hostile looks; then Irmgard drew her hair like a veil over her breast, and seated herself on the moss by the fountain, that she might conceal her bare legs. She took her child upon her lap, and held it before her. "Is the woman dumb that squats down on the ground?" cried the Queen back to her follower.

"It is Frau Irmgard herself, Princess," answered Sintram. "The Queen calls thee, Cousin Irmgard."

Irmgard remained sitting immovable, but she called out in a tone of command, "Turn thy face away, Sintram; it does not become thee to direct thine eyes to me, whilst the horse of thy Queen stamps upon my dress."

"Hast thou learnt so well what becomes a woman, in the house of thy father, from which thou hast escaped as the mistress of a foreign man?"

"Untruly dost thou slander me, though thou art a Queen," retorted Irmgard, angrily; "I live faithfully with my affianced husband. See to it,

envious one, whether thou canst boast of a like honour."

The Queen raised her arm threateningly; then there was a sound of voices on the height.

"Hither, Ingo," cried Irmgard, beside herself; "help thy wife!"

Ingo sprang down the steep footpath to her side; he was astonished at seeing his wife seated on the ground, and before her, on a horse, the angry Queen, with her attendant. He stepped past his wife, and bent his head and knee in homage before Frau Gisela. "Welcome to the great Queen of Thuringia!" he exclaimed, joyfully; "respectfully do I greet thy noble head; grant thy favour to the house of thy true cousin."

The countenance of the Queen changed, when she saw the Hero so glad and respectful in his demeanour to her, and she said kindly, "Welcome to thee also, my cousin."

"Does no one, according to Court customs, help the Queen from her horse?" exclaimed Ingo, offering the Queen his foot and arm, that she might vault down. Frau Gisela laid hold of his curly hair with her hand, to hold by it, and let herself down at his feet. "Pardon, Cousin Gisela," continued Ingo, as the Queen stood before him on the ground, "it is unfitting that

my wife should sit without clothing before the eyes of the Queen and of a stranger; graciously lend her thy mantle, that she may go away in a befitting manner." Quickly he caught hold of her mantle where the clasp held it fast, and drew it from her shoulders. The Queen turned pale, and stepped back, but Ingo threw the mantle round his wife, and raising her, ordered her to go, pointing out the path to her: "Leave us!"

Irmgard covered herself and the boy with the ample vesture, and walked up the footpath. But when Ingo turned again to the Queen, he saw how she struggled for composure, and that Sintram had sprung from his horse, and come on with drawn sword. But the Queen made a sign, and Sintram drew back obediently.

"Bold was the hand which took the mantle of the Queen, but it becomes a man to guard the honour of his house; thou, Ingo, hast courageously remedied what we in zeal did wrong, and I am not angry with thee for it." She for the second time made a sign to her attendant; Sintram retired backwards with the horses, and Ingo and the Queen stood alone opposite each other. "It has happened as I desired," began Frau Gisela; "thou art before mine eyes, Ingo, as before, when I received thee on the steps of the hall; and as

then, I approach thee with good intentions." Then she continued more earnestly, "Thou hast enemies in my country; who have evil intentions towards thee, and loud sounds the cry of revenge at the King's Castle; my countrymen, also, the Burgundians, raise, as I hear, complaints against thy plundering people."

"Thou knowest the custom on the boundaries of the land, O Queen; my people measure out for themselves their revenge for the injuries they have suffered from the foreigners. Yet if a Thuringian has been hurt by my comrades, we will hasten to atone to the injured one; but do thou, O Queen, grant the peace which Ingo and his boundary people desire from thy power."

"The Hero whom I once knew had a nobler pride than to drive the cows of the Burgundians into his enclosed fortress," said the Queen, scoffingly.

"The man who roams homeless over the earth gladly raises a roof under which he can command as Host," replied Ingo.

"I call the home insecure," replied the Queen, "out of which the mistress of the house has been demanded by the call of the people. The father, and the bridegroom whom thou hast robbed of his wife, have called for a warlike expedition against

thee; the young King needs the help of his nobles, and cannot refuse to demand of thee her whom thou hast stolen; I fear destruction approaches thee, for with difficulty has the King's will hitherto held back the angry men."

"What thou threatenest, O Queen, compels me to hold still firmer to my house; if war is approaching, it is welcome to me; the sword becomes rusty which hangs by the hearth."

"Fool!" cried the Queen, approaching nearer, "thou livest in the forest quite without misgiving, whilst on all sides the hunters are drawing together against thee. Cæsar has begun a new expedition against the Alemanni, and seeks thee to satisfy his revenge; he has offered an alliance to the Burgundians, and Gundomar has summoned the army of his people."

"Thou namest Cæsar," exclaimed Ingo; "thanks for good news, O Queen! it was for that my sword clinked; for the approach of the warriors whom I long day and night to meet." His eyes sparkled, and his hand passed to his weapon.

"Thou speakest well, Hero," exclaimed Gisela, herself carried away by his ardour; "it would be lost trouble to try to frighten thee by dangers.

I bring thee the warning, for I know of a more glorious companionship for thee, than among the peasants of the forest and boundary. Ingo, my cousin, thou art the man to whom, rather than to any other, I would trust the young King and myself; I desire a Hero, who will ride in front of the people's army in the battle, and teach my son how to win fame. To such dignity have I chosen thee, and I am here to woo thee to the King's Castle."

Ingo stood agitated; thoughts whirled rapidly through his brain. He saw before him the beautiful woman with the King's crown, holding out her hand to him, and offering him entreatingly, that which would be the desire and happiness of the proudest Hero.

"Thou wast a boy," continued Frau Gisela, with deep emotion, "when our fathers laid my hand in thine; thou becamest a hero renowned among the people, and I a discontented wife, at the King's Castle; there thou didst stroke my hand with thy finger, smiling. What divided thee from the Queen has since been laid on the burning funeral pile. Now I come and invite thee, the most illustrious of all the heroes in these countries, to come to me. We both pray to the same high God—the grandchildren to the ances-

tors; for we both descend from the race of the Gods, and high ought we to raise our heads over all the people upon man's earth; thou and I are dedicated by the invisible powers themselves to be rulers of people."

When Ingo heard from the lips of another the same words which he had spoken himself, he looked bewildered at the Queen, who thus decided like a Goddess upon his fate. There was a noise on the height above; the mantle of the Queen fell down; and in the distance there was a sound of the low whimpering of a child.

"This is the attire befitting a loved hero," exclaimed the Queen, touching his shoulder with her hand. Ingo raised his head.

"I hear a soft voice in my need," he said. "I hear my little son over me lamenting, and, like one who wakes from a dream, I stand before the Queen. I am bound to one who is dearer to me than my life. She has abandoned everything for me. I have vowed to her, amidst the circle of my blood-comrades, that I will care for her as her father, and that I will share her bed only as her lawful husband. How can I leave her and go to the King's Castle?"

"No more, Ingo!" cried Frau Gisela, with flaming countenance; "remember that thou didst hold

out thine hand to me; think of that night when I held back the sword of the dead King. Then, when I guarded thy life, the invisible powers bound my fate to thine. Thou belongest to me, and me alone, and a dear price have I paid for thee."

"Thou hast shown thyself noble-hearted, and a heroine," replied Ingo; "and I shall remain thankful to thee as long as I breathe."

"Shame upon thy cold greeting!" called out the Queen, beside herself, "and shame upon the Hero who can express in courtly words his gratitude that a woman has burdened herself for him with the curse of the death-Gods. Dost thou understand so little what I did when I restrained the sword of mine own lord and husband? I conjured up against my own life, the bad powers—suspicion, and lurking hatred; gall was ever after my drink, and that of another; every word suspected, and restlessness every night. Whether I should any longer breathe in the light whilst the other continued to drink with his wild boys, that was my anxiety—heart-gnawing anxiety—day and night."

"If thou hast suffered danger of death on my account," said Ingo, moved, "then call me when danger threatens thee, and I will willingly

pay with my blood what I have to bear of thy burden."

The Queen scarcely listened to his words; she stepped close up to him, and whispered with a hoarse voice, "Art thou so willing, beloved? It is possible that the other would not have died if thou hadst not stood in my chamber on that night."

The Hero started back; his cheeks grew pale, but his look was cold, as he answered, "Didst thou think, O Queen, that thou shouldst become more dear to my heart, if upon my account thou didst burden thy life with a terrible deed?"

"Why dost thou fix thine eyes like stone upon me?" shrieked out Frau Gisela. She seized his arm, and shook it. "We two, thou and I, cannot live near one another on this man's earth, if thou dost not follow me."

The Hero released himself angrily from her hand. "If thou hast, by secret night-work, heaped upon my head the anger of the revenging Gods, I am ready to pay the penalty—but free from thee, not as a servant bound to thy life."

The Queen looked sharply in his face; she raised her arm slowly, and clenched her hand threateningly. "The wands are thrown, on which the Weird Sisters have marked thy fate

and mine. Thou hast chosen, Ingo, and the token that thou hast found signifies danger" She turned away, with a convulsive movement; but her eyes remained tearless, and her countenance was stony, as, pointing to the setting sun, she said, half aloud: "To-morrow!" Hastily she went to the horses. Ingo flung the King's mantle with his foot down the mountain, and sprang up the path along which Irmgard had gone, to his house.

XI.

THE THUNDERSTORM.

THROUGH the small gate, which led from the spring to the fortress, Ingo hastened to the door. He found it closed and guarded by his men, and from the tower Berthar called out to him, "Look downwards, my King! there in the valley the woman is riding with her companion to the boundary. No one rushes so hastily along, who has not an anxious mind."

"She departed in anger, father." Berthar discovered in the clouded brow of the Chieftain what he did not express. "When the shepherd scares away a male wolf from the fold, the animal does not return for three days, but the hungry she-wolf ventures on a new inroad the following night. Shepherd of the Marvingians, when dost thou expect an attack upon thy fold?"

"To-morrow," replied Ingo.

The old man nodded. "We are not secure in

the north. Radgais is stationed on the watch-tower which we built on thy boundary ; he is one of the most cautious, and I do not think that he sleeps, for he spoke with the minstrel Volkmar, and knows that the spoon of a Queen of Thuringia stirs up new broth ; yet no smoke rises from his height. The day is bright and the air clear : I fear, my lord, that he does not willingly close his eyes."

"The Queen rode by the forest path, to avoid the watch-tower," replied Ingo. But at the moment that he looked out, there rose up, to the northwards, against the golden evening sky, a white vapour ; higher rose the pillar of smoke and blacker.

"We understand the warning," exclaimed Berthar ; "the Queen's boys are racing over the boundary. I heartily wish that the watchman may escape them."

"Look also towards the south, Berthar ; there the old enemy rises against us. For the third time Cæsar sues for our person ; this time he calls upon the Burgundians to destroy us ; and the Queen threatens us with the weapons of her brother Gundomar."

Again the old man looked into the face of the Chieftain, and observed by its stern expression,

that he was thinking of a hard struggle. Then he drew his waist-belt tighter, and said, with a wild smile, "The time is short to adorn the Court for two Kings. Yet thy boys are active; we have long been looking for such an honour; and he who will uninvited banquet within our circle, may himself become a banquet for the raven and eagle. Command, my King! thy boys are ready to fight."

"Light the danger-fires," ordered Ingo; "send spies to the southern border, and warn the old peasant proprietors in the villages, that they may conceal their defenceless people and herds in their forest enclosures, and send us as many armed men as they can."

Then Berthar called out, above the court, with a powerful voice, the war-cry of the Vandals: "Come on, ye sons of the swan, in armour! bear the iron cymbals, and light the pitch-flames; a more glorious dance will begin for you to-night than around burning logs."

Immediately afterwards, a mighty fire blazed from the heights, and armed men sped down the mountain on horseback.

Irmgard was sitting in the high bridal chamber, which the Vandals had constructed for her amidst the oak foliage. In her hand she held the

warning token of her mother. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy. When she heard her husband's step below in the enclosure of the fortress, she turned her eyes towards him, to see whether he would come to her; but he was speaking with Berthar. At last he ascended up to her, and stepping before her, he began: "The Queen's mantle flew down into the depths; the woman left our mountains in anger."

"I lay on the rock over the fountain; in terror and shame I threw myself down on the ground. Then I heard an interchange of talk; I saw how my husband bowed himself to the foreign woman and I heard how she demanded her right to his life."

"Then thou didst also hear that I opposed her," he replied, kindly.

"I ceased to hear the words, for my son whimpered, and I carried him to his father's bed. It is to be seen whether he will find a step-mother."

"Irmgard!" cried out her husband, frightened, "of what art thou thinking?"

"Dost thou imagine that I will lie in thy way like a stone, separating thy foot from hero-life and a King's throne? I heard my countryman say that I was not wedded to thee in lawful marriage; and degrading was the greeting offered

me by the Queen. When thou sendest thy mistress home, the Queen will become gracious to thee again, as she was before."

"Thou art vexed, and thy words cut sharp," replied Ingo; "but thou must not dream of severing the bond of union between us, because another thinks of it with bad thoughts. She wishes to separate thee from thy husband, but not, as thou imaginest, in order to prepare him a King's bed; for she thinks of another resting-place for the stranger Ingo, and she is rolling, there below in the valley, the stones to conceal him in the dark chamber."

Irmgard rose up wildly, as if stung by a serpent. But he drew the unwilling one to him, and spoke tenderly to her. "Wearisome has been my journey upon man's earth: whilst yet a boy, I was obliged to roam, like a beast of prey, through the valleys to obtain food to support my life, whilst the hunters crept upon my path. Many a time was I sick of my life, when I humbly begged for small bones at the table of a stranger, and received the cold look of a guest-friend. Yet I think that I have not ingloriously penetrated the battle-ranks of the enemy, and have honourably won for myself, some day, a happy seat in the halls of the Heroes. Then the

last leap into the host of enemies appeared to me the greatest good fortune; and when the battle-song sounded, then I heard the immortals call up their grandchild into their retinue. Now first, since I have seen thee, and thou hast become dear to me as my own life, I have found much pleasure in this world, and it has often appeared to me agreeable to sit and laugh in the sunshine above the valleys, when the little kids jumped about amongst one another, and my fighting-comrades brought home the wild honeycomb in casks. But the Gods who have granted me such happiness have also allotted to me that it should not be lasting, and should be sorrowful for thee who art dear to me. By a daring robbery I was obliged to win thee. Thou art poorer, as my wife, than at home. No one calls out 'Welcome!' to thee but my wild comrades and the settlers, who have sworn fealty to me because they had bad fortune at home. I have often been aware, when beside the banished man, thou didst strive to conceal thy tears and sighs for home. To-day I was warned by the super-terrestrials, when the mantle fell. It is very possible, my wife, that they will invite me to themselves; therefore I am anxious now that the passage there should be glorious, and hurtful to the enemy."

"Ride away from the forest enclosure," exclaimed Irmgard, "and form a new home in a foreign land."

"The wild beast glides out of his den when the hounds run, but not the Father of a people."

"Thou didst live concealed during a happy year; thou didst raise thy boy in thy shield, and thy wife hung about thy neck. Think thereon, Ingo, before thou chooseth." She fixed her eyes, full of anguish, on his face.

Ingo stepped once more to the little light aperture, and spied on all sides into the dim landscape. The heavens shone like red gold, and below in the valley, the mist was rising from the stream. He looked upon the undulating hills, the dark forests, and the fruitful plain; then he turned to his wife, and embraced her. "When the minstrel sang in the hall, and thou before all didst honour to the stranger, then I became dear to thee, because I, the Hero, trod foremost on the death-path. Has thy mind changed, Vandal wife?"

"The anguish that I feel, to lose thee!" answered Irmgard, softly, and concealed her face on his breast.

Ingo held her in a fast embrace. "I held my head high as a homeless one; gaily did I enjoy

the happiness of the day, because I considered life little in comparison to a glorious death. I was proud of being true to every one to whom I had vowed myself, and a terror to mine enemies. He who would humble this pride, him I could kill, or he would strike me. But more proudly than formerly do I prepare, this time, for the fight. More powerful is the pressure of the enemy's approach than it has ever been before; and thou, beloved, shalt behold with thine eyes whether the minstrel has extolled the Hero with truth. Prepare thyself, Princess, for the day of honour to thy husband, for soon wilt thou hear round thy bridal chamber the wild song of thy swans, and above the clouds thou wilt behold the heavenly bridges on which the Heroes rise upwards."

Darker did the shadows of the night become; the danger-fires flamed, and cast a red light, and smoky clouds hung over the court, where the men were equipping themselves for defence. They emptied the yard of waggons and implements, brought spears, and heaped up stones; the maidens also helped,—they brought many loads of water from the spring, and filled the vessels and barrels in the hall; messengers of the village people ran into the court, gigantic men

sprang up and down, and the word of command of the leader sounded in the enclosed space.

Irmgard descended with Frida from her high chamber; her doubts had been overcome, and she stepped over the court as if supported by the strength of a Goddess. Berthar smiled with satisfaction when she approached him. He rose quickly from the ground, where he was hammering at a great sling, and greeted her as a warrior does his Chief. "I am rejoiced to see the Queen adorned; the light of her countenance rejoices me, and also the gold ornament on her breast. I delight in the high festival where the bride appears in such rich attire. For we boys shall fight more cheerfully when we behold the Princess bending herself like a battle-maiden over the warriors. But do thou listen to the secret advice of the old man. Thou wast a good mistress to the wild boys in peaceful times; thou hast cared for all, and wast proud towards all, as becomes a prudent Hostess, that no mead-drunk fellow might venture to cast on thee a bold look, or make an unseemly joke. But now, if it pleases thee, show a friendly feeling to the men, speak kindly to each, and distribute the provisions bountifully, which thou keepest in cellar and barn. For I have no fear that we

shall be deficient in meat and drink as long as we fight ; and many a one strikes more furiously and throws his weapon more strongly when he has been treated among his comrades with mead, and superior delicacies. Hitherto we have had only to lurk after the Burgundian robbers ; this time we shall have work which will be related to future generations."

Irmgard held out her hand, which the old man clasped respectfully. "For me everything has come as I have always wished it," he continued—"a short field, and a hot fight, and I by the side of my master. Only the troop is too small that rides with him over the field of battle ; that makes me anxious ; for the God of war prefers counting shocks of mown-down men rather than single blades."

"Come on, Wolf !" cried Berthar to the young Thuringian ; "thou hast a good way in converse with the women, and they boast of thee as a dancer. Therefore thou shalt watch as guardian over the women. Thou shalt be their leader when they roll down stones from the rock, and when they swing their buckets against fire-arrows on the gable roof. Lift the skins of cattle and deer which we have collected out of the ditch, and spread the steeped leather over

the wooden roof; for the wet hides serve us as the best protection, next to the foliage of the trees, against fire-throws."

"I had thought to stand near my master," replied Wolf, discontentedly.

"No one will prevent thee from making thy spring at the right time," said the old man, consolingly, "but thy work is more glorious than thou imaginest, for I observe that those out there also will fight in women's way, whether the pap shall be burnt by one or the other."

"Thou thinkest, father, it will be a hot day for many of us."

"For many of them, it becomes us to say," replied Berthar. "Only take care and be smartly dressed, to please the Weird Sisters."

"I am not thinking of myself," answered Wolf, looking over his shoulder back towards the house.

"Never look backwards, is the law of fighting men; all that is behind thee may take care of itself; thou must see only those who are before thee."

As Wolf was drawing the bundle of wet hides by a rope up the roof, Frida placed herself before him, and began, mockingly, "Thou art chosen for glorious service; the carpets smell badly which

thou spreadest over us. If thou art the chamberlain to protect us women, the enemy will remain ten steps from us, and raise their noses upwards with horror."

"If I were the Chieftain," replied Wolf, angrily, "I would place thee over the door, before all the armies, in order that thou mightest wound the heart of the enemy. Help me to raise the ladder inside the hall to the aperture in the roof, and hold the rope that I may loosen the skins above."

Frida willingly followed his orders, and when he had spread all and come down from the top, he found himself with her in the empty room, and gave her quickly a kiss. Frida did not resist, but suddenly took off a ribbon, and said, "Hold thine arm, Wolf, that I may bind thee. If we see another evening, to-morrow I will belong to thee as thy wife; often have I been cross with thee; to-day I tell thee that thou art dear to me, and no other." She bound his arm; but he exclaimed, "I will extol the anger of the Queen, which has taken the thorn from the thistle." She kissed him heartily, then tore herself away, and rushed to the maidens.

The clouds were driving again under the crescent moon; wild figures, men's bodies, and horses' limbs were now encircled with yellow light, and

now coal-black in the grey twilight. The mist rolled out from the Idisbach, and rose upwards against the circular rampart and the fortress. The cries of animals and the voices of men sounded about the fortress gate; the village people led the horses and cattle, and the brown woolly sheep along the paths from below; the men walked with linden shields, and drove the herds in haste with their spears; the women and children hastened, with their household furniture heaped up. Sorrowful was the journey up to the height to them; for he who looked backwards was fearful whether he should ever return alive to the house which he had just built, or whether the house itself would not burst into flames. The fugitives thronged up to the closed gate of the lower rampart, and the Vandals, who guarded the entrance there, had to cry out and direct them, that they might not in the darkness miss the path that led to the gate. On the summit the fortress was filled with men and herds; the cattle bellowed, the horses galloped wildly about, and the women squeezed themselves with their bundles against the wooden rampart. But Berthar desired the men to place the domestic animals in rows,—to enclose the sheep in a pen. In the middle of the space a fire was flaming;

there the pots steamed for the hungry, and the cellarer tapped the beer for the thirsty, which they abundantly desired. Berthar went from one man to another, greeted them with dignity, as in peaceful times, asked their opinions, and thus sensibly scrutinized their number and their dispositions. "Why do the neighbours delay from the other bank of the stream? where are the strong armed peasants from Ahornwald and Finkenquell?" he cried out to the Thuringian Baldhard. "Has the white fog blinded the senses of the Marvingians, that they have not heard the cry of the watchman, nor seen the light of the fire?"

"Slowly do they bestir themselves," replied Baldhard, troubled. "I saw herds and carts drive to their holy places in the forest; they will not be in haste to leave their horses and children. Yet haste would be advisable for them, for in the last twilight a host was advancing; alongside the stream shields and iron helmets shone. And I suspect they are the wild boys of the Queen, who are seeking a night's quarters in the houses on the other side."

On the path from below a horseman galloped wildly, his horse covered with foam, and in going through the gate he nodded to the old man.

“Radgais!” called out the latter, hastening after him to the hall where Ingo, with the elders of the villages, was receiving intelligence from the warriors. The messenger sprang down greeting. “The King’s boys press on in glittering troops, across our boundary; it is their whole swarm, and besides them Theodulf’s men. With difficulty did I escape over the mountain. But they keep behind the trees in the valley, for there are hardly more than a hundred shields.”

“Didst thou see the Queen?”

“Besides Theodulf, only the old robber Hadubald.”

“If Frau Gisela can put no larger troop in the saddle,” said Berthar, contemptuously, “few of her trusty men will see again the home drinking-cup.”

“There comes one from the Main, who announces other guests,” replied Ingo. Walbrand, the Vandal, rushed in.

“As I came, my King, through the pine-wood towards the south, in order to spy over the boundary, I heard on the path the clattering of shields. I concealed my horse, and turned on foot through the thicket; they came in a long train—an army of Burgundians separated into three troops, infantry and horsemen. A foreign

fellow rode beside the leader ; it was a Roman of the body-guard of Cæsar, whom they called Protector. I recognized the helmet and the armour, and heard his laugh, and Roman words. Carelessly they waded on through the sand, without vanguard or scouts, quite secure of victory. With a few followers I could have excited terror among them. Out of the thicket I screeched at them as the night raven screeches ; then they stopped alarmed, and looked through the trees up towards the clouds. But I from behind the stems threw my weapon at the Roman ; the hero fell on the sand groaning, but they screamed out aloud, and I sprang into the darkness. I hope it will be an evil omen to them."

"We extol the anxiety of the Queen," said Ingo, "that she has called out a foreign host in armour against my men. Did she trust the good-will of the Thuringians so little that she invited her own native people to the sword-dance ? Where didst thou scare her heroes by the song of the bird ?"

"Half way between here and the Main," answered Walbrand. "I saw, also, how they stopped in astonishment, and encamped for the night. The Burgundians awake late ; but even if they hasten themselves, they will not be in the

valley before the morning is advanced. I observed horses' steps in the mist below, on the other side of the stream."

Ingo gave him a sign of dismissal, and said to Berthar, "Take care, my father, that all sleep except the watchman; for to-morrow they will need eyes which will be firm in their heads, and rested limbs. Keep good watch at the gate, that an enemy may not slip in during a brief opening. At morning dawn we will collect the peasants, and count heads. The troop will be small for the surrounding space; but we fight for life, and the others for scanty booty. For the last time before we dedicate ourselves to the anger of fight, I greet thee in peace, my father. That they should esteem us fugitive men worthy of a large national arming, causes us to laugh to-day; and for that I thank thee, thou trusty one."

The morning dawned; the clouds were edged with a blood-red tinge, and concealed the sun. In the enclosed fortress the sleepers rose from the ground. The men equipped themselves for the service of the war-God—the merciless one; they anointed and brushed up their hair, so that it bristled red; they wound round their arms and necks circlets of bronze and gold; they drew their belts close round their bodies, that their

steps might be more agile, and the swing of their limbs more powerful. Many a one put on his shirt of deer-skin, covered with iron scales ; many also threw off their brown woollen jackets, and opened their shirts, that one might see the glorious scars on their breasts. Gloomy was the look of the warriors, wild their spirit, and silent their deed, for it was unbecoming to employ useless speech in the service of the God of battle.

Berthar said to Wolf, who was arming himself near him, offering him a thick gold armlet, " Long have I kept this ornament, which I once received as a King's gift. Take it to-day as a present from thy comrade; not undecorated shalt thou swing thy spear by our side—that the enemy may not say : ' See what niggardly reward the Thuringian gains at the bench of the stranger ! ' "

Wolf put the armlet on his arm, looked at the old man gratefully, and answered, " Think also, father, when thou arranges the combat, that I may not remain as the women's guard ; and be not angry if I say one other thing : the master's enemy is also the man's enemy—but I should prefer to raise my arm against the Burgundians, who are not of my race."

The old man laughed gloomily. " Uselessly dost thou bark, like a young hound. The smell of

blood is not yet under thy nose ; when the day advances, and the clouds there above roll blacker, thou wilt think less of these anxieties."

The stone of sacrifice was erected before the hall of the King. The warriors collected around it: Ingo entered, with his men from the hall, in a grey steel shirt, with a helmet which was ornamented with the head of a boar; the teeth of the monster were of silver, and his eyes glowed red. The boys led a young horse up; Berthar pushed forward the sacrificial steel into his body, and cut the deadly wound. The King sang the blood-prayer, each man stepped up, and dipped his right hand into the horse's blood; and all swore to each other to be true till death, and obedient to their lord.

From the top of the tree, a clear woman's voice called out, "Defend thyself, O King! the enemy's shields glisten, and the points of their spears." The horn of the watchman gave warning by a wild cry, and a messenger sprang up to the King. "The troop of King's men ride along the stream—among them the Queen!" Then there was the sound of a war-cry in the court of the fortress; the warriors seized shield and spear, and formed themselves into a circle, to sing the battle-prayer in the hollow of the shield. The wild song

resounded loud through the valleys, slowly and solemnly in the beginning, then swelling out like the storm-wind, till it sounded sharp and piercing, like the howl of the wind's bride. When it ceased, a yelling cry answered from below. Berthar gave out the commands, and the warriors in the order of their troops went down the hill, and occupied the surrounding ramparts. "The battle-song sounded discordant," said Berthar, in a low tone, to Ingo, "unlike that of our men and the country people; thou wilt to-day only trust in home ways."

Once more Ingo mounted with the old man to the top of the tree. "Frau Gisela, in truth, brings no one with her but the merry men of her Castle, and the followers of Sintram. Therefore she has invited the Burgundians, that they may accomplish her work quickly; and willingly are they come, for they are ten to one of us. See, Hero, they are already drawing the circle of shields round our trench. Down to the rampart! Good manners demand that I should greet the Queen: I hold the side where she commands; do thou lead the people southwards against the foreign bands."

With flying step the heroes hastened to the barricade. All around rose a cry; arrows and

spears flew; in small bands the besiegers sprang on, carrying stones and gigantic trusses towards the outer wall, in order to fill the trench.

Northwards, where the fight was hottest, Ingo's battle-cry sounded powerfully above all, and southwards the voice of Berthar answered; and where the King was throwing his spears, there was Theodulf, foremost in the fight, demanding revenge. More than once his spear trembled near to Ingo's head, on the rafter of the rampart; and the shield of the Thuringian burst clattering by the weapon of the King. But the attack of the besiegers failed; with hot cheeks they turned backwards, set in order their broken bands, brought together planks from the Thuringian village and from the forest, and worked hard upon them with axe and hammer.

"The fists of thy comrades were raised with a powerful swing," cried out Berthar to Bero's sons, approvingly; "have the Queen's boys turned into work-people? despicable is the warrior who cowers behind a log shield." To Ingo he said, laughing, "The Burgundians showed little zeal in striking; the victims that have fallen to the God of war on my side are not numerous; and we must beg him to be graciously contented with a few, as the cuckoo said to the bear, when

he offered him three dead flies as a guest's repast."

The grey thunder-clouds rolled under the hot rays of the mid-day sun, when the horns of the besiegers called to a new fight, and again the howling battle-cry rose in both hosts. Stronger was the stormy assault, and greater the danger, for the besiegers had not used their axes in vain. From all sides they drove on behind strong log shields, and again they threw stones and bundles of wood into the trench, and dragged stems of trees and long beams to bridge it over; the Burgundians had also erected a scaffolding, on which hung a beam as a battering-ram; thundering did the beam swing against the bulwark, and long hooks tore the planked fence down into the trench. The fiercest fight raged round the wild instrument. When one troop of besiegers retreated, in a moment another sprang on; for behind the fighters was the Queen, urging them with words and raised arms incessantly to the storm. At last the hostile bands succeeded in making a rent here and there in the outer rampart. Then for a time the fight raged about the open path; the garrison of the fortress worked hard to stop the gap by their wooden shields and bodies. But as the flood pours through the

broken dam, so did the overpowering number of the enemy storm in, and the small bands of defenders were pressed back towards the height. Ingo stood before the gate of the fortress, with a few blood-companions, who had fought by his side, and covered with shield and spear the retreat of their warriors. At last he sprang himself through the gate, and the bridge was raised behind him.

The besiegers gave a cry of victory, and pressed on against the rampart of the fortress, which surrounded the mountain. But short was their joy: from the steep height the spears now flew thicker, and great stones were hurled down, and made bloody paths among the storming bands. Small was now the chain of the defenders, and their anger mixed with anxiety, as they were fighting for the last bulwark which protected them from destruction; all hands bestirred themselves; the women also stood with petticoats tucked up high, raising the stones, and reaching them to the men. At last it became impossible for the enemy to cling to the steep path; they flew with great leaps back, and the huge pieces of rock hurled down broke the legs of many.

Then the Queen rode angrily before her men, and called out, "If you wish any longer to drink

the Queen's mead, ye capering heroes, struggle upward to the willows, and throw down the stone trough from which they refresh themselves; then they may catch the running drops with their lips." Theodulf flew round the hill, and ordered a general onset from all sides; again the horns sounded and cries yelled out, and again spears and stones flew from the top of the hill. But whilst the circle of besiegers shot their arrows from below, whenever a head or an arm projected over the rampart, Hadubald crept, with four comrades, in the channel of the spring up to the willows, all bending under their shields, and with strong lifting-poles in their hands. They passed behind the trees, where the rock protected them; but the threatening danger did not escape the attention of the Hero Berthar, who collected together his nearest comrades, and hastened with them down through the gate. "We will catch them from below; you send your arrows from the rock, that no one may escape." Then, as the old man sprang among the trees, the mighty stone trough groaned as thrown downwards from its bed. Berthar cried angrily to Hadubald, "It brings a curse upon thee to change a wine carouse into a water-spring," and broke his head with his club, before the other could raise his weapon. The

other King's men also were slain by the strokes of the Vandals; only one sprang upwards, but he sank to the ground on the path with a death-arrow in his back, and his fall was greeted by a loud cry of joy from the height. After that the battle-cries ceased, and both above and below, rapid words buzzed among the bands.

"The stone trough is thrown down," said Berthar, returning, in a low voice to Ingo; "the water now runs wildly downwards, and it will be difficult for the comrades around to provide water for their beasts."

"The Queen knew the fountain," answered Ingo, with a gloomy smile. "If those below could throw the stone, we may raise it again. Prepare the trees; choose the fighters and the protecting shields round the lifting arms of the country-men." Whilst Ingo spoke, an arrow, whirling over him, struck into the tower scaffolding, and a small flame blazed where it caught. "There Frau Gisela tells our people of the devastated spring," cried out Berthar. Round about the hill single bowmen sprang upwards, and shot fiery arrows into the bulwark, carefully endeavouring by agile movements to avoid the stones which were cast down. Here and there the flames caught the beams and posts; the

besieged struck against the arrows with poles, and put out the flames, but the fire blazed ever more and more; wildly sounded the cry of the warning one; the children howled; the horses bounded, when a fiery arrow flew under them, burst their halters, and rushed madly through the thronged multitude. Then the work became painful, and the hope and courage of many of the defenders sank.

A horseman with a small retinue, galloping at full speed, approached the Queen's bands. He and his attendants were received with loud acclamations from Theodulf's troop. Herr Answald descended from his horse. "Deceptive news invited me to thy Court, O Queen, whilst thou art here dealing out revenge for my cause."

"Thou comest here uninvited and unwelcome," replied the Queen; "I do not intend to place thee betwixt me and revenge; the uncalled-for mediator is hit with arrows from both sides. No mortal can avert the fate of those yonder, if they cannot do it themselves."

"If the Queen will rule over the people of Thuringia, she must honour the customs of the country. I see there women and children of our blood; it is horrible that spears and fiery arrows should be hurled against the defenceless of our

own people. Whoever is a free Thuringian, and desires victory in an honourable fight, let him help me to avert this shame, and pray with me to the Queen, that she may give up what will make us all an abomination in the memory of men."

"The Prince speaks well," cried out an old warrior, and the Thuringians cast their spears together, crying out, "Hail to Herr Answald!" Gloomily did the Queen look upon the troop, but she was silent.

"Hear me, Princess," exclaimed the Chieftain, horrified at her hard countenance; "my own child, whom I once promised to Theodulf, is among the fire-arrows, and like her, other women from the forest arbour. It is for me alone to punish my child, and no one, not even thou, shall take her away over my head." He sprang into the path before the troop. "Here I stand, Answald, a Prince of Thuringia. Many a time have I led your armies to battle. Before you venture to slaughter the unwarlike, who lift their arms in the enclosure there, you shall first kill me, that I may not outlive the shame." Again there sounded a loud acclamation of the warriors.

"To me, you King's boys!" cried out Frau Gisela, raising herself up. But Theodulf and

Sintram pushed their horses up to the Queen, and spoke in a low tone to her. "If thou wert not beside thyself, old man," began the Queen, at last, her voice trembling with anger, "I would punish thee, thou foolhardy man, for exciting these to disobedience. I care little to shed the blood of peasants, even though they have unlawfully settled themselves outside the boundary. Let the horn be sounded, Theodulf, and call into the enclosure. The country people shall have free exit, not only the women and children, but also the men, if they will withdraw weaponless from the fortress, by the grace of the Queen, without injury to body or property." Again there sounded from the troops a joyful cry of approbation. With long-drawn tones the horn admonished to abstain from fight. Theodulf stepped to within a spear's throw of the gate, and called out into the fortress, with powerful voice, the grace of the Queen.

Within there arose a stormy movement. The gate remained closed, but at the ramparts and at the palisades wild figures rushed about in despair, throwing down poles and beams and rolling down after the woodwork. A flying troop flowed here and there from the entrenchments, with women and children in terrified throngs, also

horses and cattle. Some individual men likewise sprang down, whose hands were still blood-red with the oath of the sacrifice, terrified by the danger, and weary of a hopeless struggle. Yet most of the peasants stood on the height crowded together, their shields at their feet; they looked uncertainly after the women and the rushing herds. Only their oath and shame held them back. Then Ingo stepped up to them, and cried with a loud voice, "Freely did you come, and freely may you also go, as your fellow-countrymen call you. Discontented looks and unwilling service do I not desire. I honour little the warrior who thinks of wife or child during the fight. I willingly release you from your oath; provide, if you choose, for your own safety."

Then many laid their shields on the rampart, and sprang downwards, without looking behind them. But Berthar called out to the remaining band: "All the chaff does not fall from the wheat on the threshing-floor at one blow. I still see many whom the wind may blow away over the fence; try once again, ye proud comrades! We may gladly do without the companionship of the forest people." Again shields fell to the ground, and the bearers of them disappeared with sulky mien.

“Why does my King tarry to behold their wretchedness? They would leap better, if shame did not tie their legs. Yours is the choice; one way leads upwards to the hall of the King; the other downwards to your disgrace.”

He followed his lord, who hastened up to the hall. Those that had remained behind stood for some minutes together; when they saw themselves alone, their warlike anger disappeared. Only a few hastened after the King; the others, weaponless, passed into the open country. Among the last who left the enclosure were Baldhard and Bruno.

From below the bands of the Queen sprang up, shouting. Those who were seeking to depart had made the entrance easy to them; storming up, they forced open the fastening of the gate, and thronged eagerly towards the open space before the hall. But they quickly drew back, for from the sling which Berthar had placed on the entrance to the steps, pointed wooden arrows flew into their ranks. They sought shelter by the ramparts, and again spears flew hither and thither, and from below the fire-arrows went against the roof.

White smoke whirled along the roof-rafters of the hall, and a voice sounded through it:

“Water up there!” A man climbed up the ladder, and called from on high: “It crackles in the roof; the ox-hide swells; a Burgundian arrow has carried the fire to a projection of the roof; it sparkles and flashes; the buckets are empty.”

“The Queen is cooling herself at our well,” cried Berthar; “if water fails thee, pour our beer on the tongues of fire.” A blast of wind passed howling over the roof, carrying a cloud of smoke with a fiery blaze on high. A cry of jubilee from the enemy followed the blast of wind; tongues of flame broke out here and there through the covering hide. “Come down, Wolf!” cried out Berthar to the hero on high, who with singed hair and black hands, with difficulty held fast to the ladder; “a spring is running fast from thy body,—it drops red from the ladder.”

“It was not enough to extinguish the fire,” answered Wolf; he came down, shook his bloody hand, and seized shield and spear. “Open the doors, blood-comrades,” commanded Berthar, “that the draught of air may drive away the smoke from our Princess. Shall the King alone hold watch? Throw spears all round the building: as far as they can fly now reaches the kingdom of the Vandals.”

Ingo stood on the steps of the hall, covered with a shield; over him drove thick clouds of smoke, driven by the storm on to the bands of the enemy, covering their armour and faces.

"The hall is opened," cried Ingo, to those staring in; "the Host waits with a welcome; why do the faint-hearted guests delay?"

A figure sprang towards him out of the smoke—a shieldless man, and a voice cried out, "Irmgard, my child! thy father calls: save thyself, unhappy one!"

Irmgard heard the cry in the hall; she rushed wildly up, and laid her son in Frida's arms. And again there was a cry from without, shriller and more full of anguish: "Irmgard! lost child!"

Ingo placed his shield on the ground, and looked back over his shoulder. "The hawk cries after his nestling; obey the call, Princess of Thuringia."

The wife rushed past her husband to her father, amidst the hostile spears. A cry of joy and welcome burst from the Thuringian band. She embraced her father, and exclaimed, "It is well for me that my eyes behold thee, and that thou holdest me to thy breast."

The heart of the Hero Answald trembled, and

he drew her to him. "Thy mother awaits thee, dear child."

"Bless me!" cried Irmgard; "hot is the room where a poor child screams for its mother; bless me, father!" she cried out to him convulsively, holding him fast.

The Prince laid his hand upon her head; she bent low down before his knees, then rose up quickly, stepped back, and stretching out her hand towards him, exclaimed, "Greet my mother!" Then she bounded backwards to the burning house. Ingo had stood immovable, directing a sharp look at the enemy. But when his wife returned to him, in his death-peril he stepped towards her, spread out his arms, and embraced her. Then an ash spear, whirled from Theodulf's hand, struck the King on his side, under his arm. Ingo sank quietly down from the arms of his wife towards the hall; Berthar sprang forward, and covered the wounded man with his shield, whom his men, sighing, carried to the raised Prince's seat. Before him knelt Irmgard, but Berthar cried out into the room, "Leave the women to sorrow over the King's wound: on quickly, comrades, to follow the King on his path! There are four doors in the King's hall; from each there is a path to

the halls of Heaven. Take care that you revenge the King's wound. Walbrand, thou wast the last on thy lord's bench; therefore to-day thou shalt leap forward as first, and I will be the last."

The Vandals sprang to the doors and down the steps, one after the other, as the old man called them. And anew there arose round the house the noise and tumult of the fight. Wildly did the storm-wind drive over the flaming roof; high above, the thunder rolled; the roof of the hall cracked, ashes and burning splinters fell down. Frida, stunned, placed the child on the King's bed.

"The boy laughs!" exclaimed Irmgard, throwing herself sobbing over the child, which was kicking its little legs about merrily, and stretching out its hands to the flaming pieces on the ground. Irmgard held her child in a fast embrace, and there was a dead silence in the room; then she tore away the pocket of otter-skin, the gift of the Weird woman, from her dress, hung it round the body of the little child, hid it in the covering, and once more kissing the child, cried out to Frida, "Save him, and sing to him about his parents."

But Frida sprang up to Wolf, who stood as

guard by the King's bed, and beseeched him—"Come, at the back-door there are men from our harbour; we will penetrate into the forest."

Then the old man cried out with a hoarse voice, "Where does the foremost dancer tarry? The leapers wait."

"Farewell, Frida," answered Wolf, "we do not go out of the fire by the same door; farewell, and think of me." Once more his true eyes looked upon her, then with a powerful bound he burst out of the door, sprang over the glowing logs of wood before the steps, and thrust his spear into the breast of one of the Queen's boys, so that he fell, and a loud cry sounded among the circle of men. Arrows flew upon the Hero; he bled from many wounds, but swinging his sword, he threw himself into the band before which Theodulf stood; wounded they reeled back, right and left; wildly he raised his weapon against his old bench companions, then fell himself, dying.

Again Theodulf's voice was heard, powerfully warning: "The rafters shake; save the women!" Prince Answald cried out, springing up to the door, "Irmgard! Save my child!" Then the shrunk figure of the old man raised itself before him at the door, his head covered with ashes, his

beard burnt, and a longing for revenge in his countenance. And he called out grimly, "Who is it, who so audaciously makes a noise at the sleeping-chamber of the King, and demands admittance? Is it thou,—the fool who once repented that he had offered the rights of guest? Thou didst dismiss my King with a cold greeting; cold as iron shall be the answer which the Vandal offers thee." Quickly as a beast of prey he sprang from the steps, and thrust his weapon through the coat-of-mail and breast of the Chieftain of Thuringia. Then he called out to the dismayed band, "All is accomplished, and the end is good. Go home, pale-nosed fools, and turn with the women the mill-stones of your Queen. The great King of the Vandals ascends upwards to his ancestors." Shots flew around him, but he shook off the iron like a wounded bear; he turned himself heavily towards the hall, placed himself with his shield at the foot of the King's bed, and never spoke again.

The Queen rode through the broken gate up to the burning hall. The thunder rolled loud, and the lightning flashed; the gold covering of the coat-of-mail which enclosed her breast glowed like a red fire, from the flames of the house. She descended from her horse to the ground; the men

drew timidly back, for deadly pale was her countenance, and dark her frowning brow.

She stood immovable, looking at the glare. Only once she stirred, and cast her flaming eyes on one side, when she saw a woman with a child, which she held fast in her arms, struggling amongst the men.

"It is only a servant-maid," said Theodulf, half aloud, with pale cheeks, "and it is the child." The Queen, with a vehement gesture, commanded the woman to be led on one side. The fire ran along the ledge of the house, high against the clouds; the storm drove on the flames so that they blazed up wildly; it threw burning splinters against Frau Gisela and the band of men. But the Queen stood immovable, with eyes fixed on the glow.

Within the house all was still; Irmgard knelt by the bed of her husband; her hair covered his wound; she held him in a fast embrace, and listened to his breathing.

The mortally wounded man laid his arm round her, and gazed into her eyes silently. "I thank thee, Ingo," she said; "receive my greeting, beloved; we shall lie both together on the last bed." The thunder rolled near her. "Dost thou hear those above calling?" mur-

mured the dying man. "Hold me, Ingo!" cried Iringard. A flaming flash of lightning filled the hall, a thunder-clap roared, and the rafters of the roof fell down.

Outside a shower of hail poured down on the stunned men of the Queen; the pieces of ice struck upon helmets and coats-of-mail. "The Gods invite their son to join them in their hall," cried out the Queen, covering her head with her mantle. But the men threw themselves to the ground under their shields, and concealed their faces from the anger of the thunder-God. When the storm had passed over, and the warriors rose timidly to look about them, the green surface of the hill was covered with grey ice, the house lay in a heap, and little tongues of flame rose from the moist embers. But the Queen, as if turned into stone, still stood before the burning spot, and said in a low tone, "The one lies quiet on a hot bed, the other stands without, struck by the hail; the envy of the Gods has exchanged my lot; it was my right to have been with him there."

"Where is his child?" they enquired, searching round with wild looks. Frida and the child had disappeared. The warriors sought in the mountain slopes, and in the valley; they spied

into every hollow tree, and amid the tangled branches of every thicket. Theodulf rode, with his followers, through the whole district of the forest people, and enquired at every hearth-fire. But the Queen never obtained any intelligence of the son of Ingo and Irmgard.

END

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